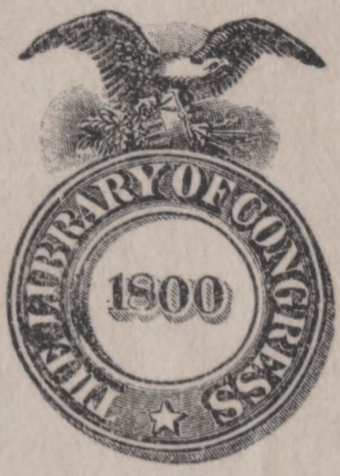


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MARRIED OR SINGLE?

BY

B. M. CROKER

Author of "Diana Barrington," "A Family Likeness," etc.

IN TWO PARTS—PART ONE.

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PETER FENELON COLLIER, PUBLISHER, 523 W. 13TH ST., N. Y.

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MARRIED OR SINGLE?

CHAPTER I

THE PUPIL-TEACHER

MRS. AND THE MISSES HARPER.

SELECT ESTABLISHMENT

FOR

YOUNG LADIES.

THE above, engraved in bold characters on a highly-polished brass plate, may be read on the gate of an imposing mansion situated in the far-spreading suburbs of Riverside, one of the principal mercantile towns in England. "Harperton" is a solid and secluded residence, standing in its own grounds (of two acres, one perch). It is planned to resemble a country house of some pretensions, but the symmetry of its proportions is spoiled by a long, low building jutting out at the side, that may be taken for anything from a stable to a billiard-room, but is, in fact, the scene of Mrs. Harper's scholastic labors, erected

at her own cost—in other words, the schoolroom. This apartment is illuminated by six windows, the lower halves of which are, of course, of muffled glass. The floor is carpeted here and there, as it were, in squares or plots, and in the midst of each square there is a desk and a comfortable cushioned chair. These indicate the localities of the various classes. The schoolroom walls are covered with maps, book cases, lists of rules and practicing hours, and lined with narrow desks and benches. A worn piano, a prim, white-faced clock, and a high wire fender comprise most of the furniture—ornamental and otherwise; unless we include the two young ladies who are sitting at one of the far desks, making the most of their time while the boarders are out for their usual walk. One of these damsels has mendaciously pleaded earache in order to escape the hateful daily promenade. The other—that nondescript character, a pupil-teacher—is fulfilling a part of her duties, and diligently darning the "little ones'" stockings, while her companion, with both elbows on the desk, and both hands in her ruffled hair, watches her and talks

"This must be perfectly awful for you, Maddie dear," she was saying. "Don't you loathe it all, and wish you could run away? I should, if I were in your shoes."

"Run away! What nonsense, Flo! Where could I run to, even supposing such an insane idea had entered my head, which it never has done? You forget that I have no friends in

England; and, after all, I am not such an object of pity as you seem to imagine," darning steadily all the time.

"If you are not, I should like to know who is!" demanded her schoolfellow, emphatically. "You are one day at the top of the tree, the head of the first class, the best pupil Herr Kroot ever had, adored by the Harpies"—here Miss Blewitt alluded to her respected instructress and daughters—"always exquisitely dressed, with heaps of pocket-money, sleeping in the best room, allowed a fire in winter, every extra—claret and coffee—and I don't know *what!* After years and years of this style of thing, and when you are seventeen, and almost finished, your father suddenly stops supplies, you are not paid for for three whole terms, and the hateful Harpies make you into a regular drudge—a pupil-teacher, a nursery governess, a servant! You sleep in the attic with those odious little Smiths—wash, dress, and teach them; you go messages to the shops, and even into Riverside—you, who were never allowed to stir one yard alone; you mend and darn and teach."

She paused, not from lack of words, but from want of breath.

"And a very good thing that I *can* do something to pay for my living," remarked the other, with composure. "If I could not sew and mend and teach, what would become of me, I should be glad to know? I could scarcely expect the Harpers to go on keeping me at their own expense; and now I take the fifth class, the little

ones' music, and I save a servant for those Indian children, I work for my bread—and I am worth it.''

"I should rather think you were," rejoined her listener, sarcastically. "You are worth a hundred a year to them as teacher, besides being dressmaker and nursery-maid. It makes me wild—I feel quite crazy—when I see all that they get out of you, early and late, and the shameful way they treat you! Once upon a time you were 'darling Madeline'—their 'dear, bright-faced girl,' their 'model pupil,' now you are 'Madeline West,' or 'Miss West,' and you are 'slow,' 'awkward,' 'lazy,' and 'impertinent.' Oh, dear me! dear me! sometimes I feel as if I should like to fly at Miss Selina and bite a piece out of her, I am so savage.''

"I hope to goodness you will restrain your feelings," said Madeline, with a smile, as she threaded a long needleful of black wool, and commenced on a gaping heel. "The Harpers are only human, after all! It was very hard on them, my father having failed; and all my music-lessons, and painting, and singing, and German, for two terms, had to be paid for out of their own pockets. Signor Squaletti charges half a guinea an hour. Then there were my clothes. I feel hot all over when I remember the quantity of money I laid out, believing that it would be all settled, as usual, by father's check at Christmas. There was that white dress for the breaking-up party—''

"In which you made such an impression on

the Wolfertons' friend, young Mr. Wynne," interrupted Florence, with a meaning nudge. "Oh, yes, I remember the white dress!"

"Don't, Flo! Your elbow is like a knife," expostulated her friend, with some discernible increase of color. "As to Mr. Wynne, what you say is nonsense, and you know Mrs. Harper forbids us to speak of—of—such things."

"I know that Mrs. Harper was most uneasy in her mind when she saw him dancing four times with you running—yes, dance after dance—and she came up and introduced him to Julia Flowers' two red-haired sisters, and said that gentlemen were so scarce, and her girls were not *out*, and all that sort of rubbish; and she sent him down to supper with old Mrs. Browne, and she sent you to bed because you looked pale! Oh, yes, I saw it all—all. I saw that Mr. Wynne never danced again, but stood with his back to the wall for the rest of the evening, looking as cross as two sticks. Very likely he would never have given you a thought, if you had not been so plainly and openly banished: absence makes the heart grow fonder! Mrs. Harper put the idea into his head by making such a stupid fuss—and she has only herself to thank. He sent you those flowers, he came to our church, and Miss Selina took it all to herself—the ridiculous old cat! As if he would look at her! She closed on the flowers: much good may they do her!"

"Now, Flo, how do you know that they were not for her?" asked her companion with a smile.

"But, don't let us talk about them. It is an old story."

"But I *will* talk about them," persisted Flo, angrily. "I'll talk about your nice green tailor-made, and your winter coat trimmed with fur, and your opera cloak, and your white dress—*the* white dress, which they took away from you!"

"Well, they had paid for them, you see," rejoined Madeline quietly. "I am glad they did take them—I owe them the less."

"Thank goodness your gloves and boots were too small," continued Flo, in a tone of fervent congratulation, "otherwise they would have gone also. They are rather different from the Harpers' chaussure, which is of the canal-boat type and size. Now I know what pedestrians mean when they talk of 'covering' miles of ground."

"Well, my dear excited Flo, they did not make their own feet," said the other coolly.

"How philosophical you are becoming! Quite an old head on young shoulders! Who made their tempers, I should be glad to know?—or their tongues? Thank goodness, this is my last half! Good-by to early rising, lectures, scoldings, resurrection pies, milk and water, and rice puddings. Good-by to Harperton—penitentiary and prison. Good-by to Harpies, and hurrah for home!"—throwing, as she spoke, a dictionary up to the ceiling; failing to catch which, it fell open, face downward, with a bang.

"That is May's dictionary, Flo," remonstrated the other. "You will not improve its poor back."

"If you stay here long, Madeline, you will certainly become just as preaching and particular as one of the Harpies themselves. You are tremendously sobered as it is. Who would think, to look at you darning away so industriously, that this time last year you were the queen and moving spirit of the school; always getting up charades, dances, and concerts, and carrying your point on every question, and figuratively snapping your fingers at the Harpies if they interfered with your schemes—which, to do them justice, was very seldom! Ah! my poor Maddie, since then what a change has come o'er the spirit of your dream! It is terrible. If you had always been a pupil-teacher it would be another matter, or if you had gone to another school, where no one knew that you had fallen from your high estate; but here, the scene of your triumphs, to make the descent to the very foot of the ladder, is—is frightful. I often wonder how you can bear it so well."

"I often wonder too," said Madeline shortly, winking her tears back with a great effort. "You are not going the best way to work to help me to endure my lot, Flo, raking up all these things. Bad or good, I must submit. I have no alternative—nowhere to go, until my father comes home. The best thing I can do is to be patient, and try and repay the Harpers for some of the money they have expended on me."

"Repay them!" echoed Miss Blewitt, scornfully. "They made a very good thing out of you for nine years—large profits and quick re-

turns. Now, although your father has not sent his usual remittance—is not that the word?—and they have heard that he is in business difficulties, yet I think they might have given you a little more law—a longer day. They might have exercised some patience. You have not heard of your father for more than a year, have you?" she added bluntly.

"No, not for sixteen months," answered the pupil-teacher.

"But even if he were dead," proceeded Flo, with a fine disregard of her friend's feelings, and an open defiance of the laws of good breeding, such as is occasionally to be found in girls of her age, "you could not honestly pretend to be very much cut up! You have not seen him since you were a small child. You left Australia when you were seven years old. He is a stranger to you."

"A stranger, certainly, in one way; but still he is my father, and I have a presentiment that we shall meet again, and before long," rolling up a pair of stockings as she spoke, and averting her eyes from her outspoken schoolfellow.

"Pooh! I don't believe in presentiments. *I* had a presentiment that father was going to give me a cart and cob last holidays, and it ended in smoke. If your father had been in the land of the living, surely you would have heard. I know I am saying this very baldly and plainly, but there is no use in beating about the bush—is there? You must face the position sooner or later."

"You mean the position of being an orphan?" said Madeline, tremulously. "But I refuse to accept that until I have not one grain of hope left. It is easy for you, who have your father and mother and five brothers at home, to talk in this way. Remember, I have only one relation in the world, and when I lose him I lose all."

"Well, all I can say is, that I hope your presentiment will turn out better than mine! Oh, here are the girls coming back!" she exclaimed peevishly, as a long file of figures appeared, passing the windows two and two. "What a bore they are! They seem to have only been out a quarter of an hour, and here they come marching in, disturbing our nice comfortable little talk."

Florence Blewitt, who so successfully practiced the art of plain speaking and trampling on other people's susceptibilities—people were welcome to trample on hers, she declared; she had none—was a short, squarely-built girl of sixteen, with a sharp nose, thick brown hair, intelligent gray eyes, and a very dark skin—a skin that betrayed no *soupçon* of foreign blood, but was, nevertheless, more brown than white. She was brusk, eccentric, clever, and indolent. Florence could—if she would—but she so seldom would. She preferred the ease of an undisturbed seat at the very bottom of the class to ambitious battlings and feverish strivings for the first place. She was the spoiled only daughter of a wealthy merchant and shipowner, and, being deferred to and made much of at home, was disposed to be both

arbitrary and independent at school. Moreover, she was selfish, which is not a taking trait in a young woman's character, and was anything but a popular idol. She would borrow readily, but hated to lend; and the only thing with which she was generous was her advice; the sole present she was ever known to make was her opinion —gratis. Few were honored by her liking, and if she had a friend at Harperton, it was the girl who sat beside her, conscientiously mending a basketful of most hopeless looking stockings.

"I wonder what your fate will be, Maddie?" said Flo, staring at her meditatively, and studying her delicate profile, her penciled eyebrows, her shining hair.

"I wonder, too," echoed Madeline, with a profound sigh.

Madeline West had been born in Melbourne, and sent home at the age of seven to Mrs. Harper's establishment, where she had remained for ten years. From a skinny, elf-like, wildly excitable child, she had grown up into an extremely pretty girl, with what the drawing-master termed "wonderful coloring." Her hair, eyebrows, and lashes were dark, her eyes two shades lighter, but it was in her complexion and the exquisite modeling of her head and features that her chief beauty lay. Her head was small, and beautifully set upon her shoulders; her skin was of creamy fairness, with a faint shade of carmine in her cheeks— a color so delicate that it went and came at a look or word. She was tall, slight, and wonderfully graceful; full of vivacity, ac-

tivity, versatility and resource, ready to throw herself warmly into any scheme for amusement or mischief—that was to say, twelve months previously. She was by far the most striking-looking and admired of Mrs. Harper's forty boarders, and, notwithstanding this drawback to feminine good-will, was a great favorite with pupils, teachers, and servants. Her popularity had even survived that terrible test of altered circumstances—that dire fall from the wealthy Australian heiress to the unpaid slavey of the establishment. She changed, of course, her ringing laugh and her happy air; her merry repartee and snatches of songs had disappeared with the pretty frocks and hats and shoes which she had loved so well. She was developing a staid, grown-up manner, according to her fellow-pupils; she held back from their advances—abdicated of her own accord, and her place as queen of the school was filled, after a decent interregnum, by a rich Cockney, who was as lavish of her shillings as she was frugal in the matter of h's, and who, according to Flo Blewitt, was "a harmless, good-natured, vulgar, poor creature."

It must not be supposed that Madeline West did not keenly feel her altered position. Many a bitter tear she shed in secret; many a sleepless hour she lay awake, when all her companions—with only to-morrow's lessons on their minds—were slumbering peacefully in the arms of Morpheus. Every small indignity, every slighting speech and sharp glance entered as an iron into her soul, but she made no remonstrance or reply;

her swiftly changing color was the sole index to her feelings, and what were a school-girl's—a pauper school-girl's—feelings to Mrs. Harper? To tell the truth, Madeline had never asserted herself even in her days of sunshine. She never could face an unpleasant situation; she put aside a crisis with a laugh or a gay word; her sensitive, luxurious nature shrank instinctively from all unpleasant things. She was a moral coward, though no one suspected it.

The present clouds on her sky had brought out, in an unexpected manner, unexpected depths in her character. Madeline, the humble semi-nursemaid, was an industrious, prudent, self-possessed person, who labored gravely, doggedly, from morning to night, a totally different girl to the extravagant, generous, easy-going Madeline, the butterfly who had fluttered the happy hours away for nine whole years. She was now at another seminary. Adversity is said to be an excellent school, and offers a fine test of character. Anomalous as it sounds, Madeline West had *risen* to the state of life into which she had *fallen*.

CHAPTER II

NO NEWS

THREE months had passed, and still no sign or token from Mr. Robert West. How anxiously his daughter's eyes followed Miss Selina's skinny fingers, as they dealt out the letters every morning during breakfast time—these letters having previously been thoroughly turned over, examined, felt, and even *smelled*, by that lady and her relatives. It was always the same in answer to Madeline's unspoken appeal. "No, nothing for you, Madeline," or, "No letter yet, Miss West," according to the frame of mind in which Miss Selina found herself. And then Mrs. Harper, who was seated behind an immense copper tea apparatus, would peer round it, with her keen little eyes and bobbing gray curls, and shake her head at the pupil-teacher, in a manner which signified that she did not approve of her at all! As if poor Madeline was not sick with hope deferred, and wild with a frenzied desire to get away and never pass another night under that lady's roof-tree; only there was one big *but*,

one immense drawback to her own most eager wishes, she had nowhere else to go.

The Misses Harper, who were fully alive to Madeline's value, were by no means equally anxious for her departure. She corrected exercises, ruled copy-books, relieved them of several distasteful duties, and took the little ones' music—an agonizing ordeal. She really did as much as any two paid teachers, and—an ecstatic fact—for nothing! Moreover, they had the delicious sensation that they were performing a charitable action all the time, and looked primly self-conscious and benevolent when their friends exclaimed: "How good of you, you dear, kind, Christian people, to keep that unfortunate Australian girl!"

Miss Selina, who was forty, with a complexion like that of a wax doll who has been left lying in the sun, would sigh softly and murmur the word "duty," when perhaps at that very moment the unfortunate Australian was fulfilling the least agreeable of hers—putting those fretful, ungovernable, sickly little Anglo-Indians to bed—and to sleep.

They were too young for school routine; spoiled, fractious, disobedient, and mischievous, they were Madeline's almost entire charge. Happy Madeline!

It is winter when we once more enter the schoolroom at Harperton, a bitterly cold day, and the small fire behind the wire screen does not half heat that great bare apartment, with its numerous doors and windows. Those at a dis-

tance are "out in the cold" indeed; for a double file of girls is gathered closely round the fender, talking four at a time, and making noise enough for a rookery. This is the half-hour after tea, and exclusively their own; they are indemnifying themselves for many hours of silence and French—which almost amounts to the same thing. Their speech is vigorous and unpolished, for no teacher is present except Madeline—if teacher she can be called. She is standing at a remote desk, mounting a drawing by the light of a cheap little hand-lamp. The gas is never turned on in the schoolroom until half-past six, because the twilight is so delightful (so economical they meant), quoth the thrifty Misses Harper.

The coals, which have been angrily stirred up, throw a good blaze, and reveal the faces and figures of the fire-worshipers assembled round the screen, especially the face and figure of Isabella Jones, the present reigning potentate. She has hitched herself up on the edge of the fire-guard, holding on there by the mantel-piece, and from this elevated position is dispensing law, wit, snubs, and patronage. She is very tall and thin, stoops a good deal, and is the proprietor of a tip-tilted nose, a pair of quick little brown eyes, and millions of freckles. She is also the proprietor of a quantity of pretty dresses, of unlimited pocket-money, a vast amount of self-esteem, and the largest and reddest hands in the room

Mrs. Harper's seminary is only intended for the offspring of wealthy folk. Izzie's father has made his pile in margarine, and has desired that

his daughter may have the best of everything—every accomplishment, every extra, just like a duchess. Izzie has, accordingly, a separate bedroom, and lessons from the most expensive masters; nevertheless, she is far—oh! very far—from being like a duchess. Her education was begun too late; she is naturally dull.

"I say, girls," she is screaming sociably, "isn't it grand to think that in ten days more we shall all be at 'ome?

> "'This day fortnight, where shall I be?
> Not in this academee,
> Eating scrape and drinking tea.
> This day fortnight, where shall I be?'"

She chanted in a sing-song voice, more or less through her nose.

"And there is the breaking-up dance," put in one of her satellites; "I don't want to go home till that is over."

"Gracious! I should hope not. What fun it will be," exclaimed Miss Jones. "I hope there will be lots of men this time. I 'inted as much to Miss Selina. What is the use of going to the expense of supper, and us all getting new dresses, just for the day boarders? That's what *I* say."

"What good, indeed!" put in Flo, sarcastically, as she elbowed her way to the very middle of the fire. "But pray do not make yourselves unhappy about the expense of the supper, my dear young friends. It will not concern us. I heard Mrs. Harper telling mademoiselle that they did not intend to have the girls in on this occa-

sion, gobbling up the ices and confectionery like so many locusts."

"I did not know that locusts went in for confectionery," remarked Isabella, with a sniff of scorn.

"This marvelous discovery in natural history was Mrs. Harper's, not mine," said Flo, with swelling dignity. "However, the meaning is plain. We are not to sup. We are to 'ave"—mimicking her schoolfellow—"buns and egg-sandwiches 'anded round in the schoolroom, while the company are carousing downstairs."

The "take-off" was entirely lost on Isabella, who was far too much impressed with the intelligence to be alive to Flo's impertinence. A dead silence followed this disagreeable announcement, which was at length broken by Miss Jones, who, sliding from the top of the screen in the excitement of the moment, shrilly exclaimed:

"Well, I declare! I won't stand it! I shall tell Mrs. H. so to her face. Why, our parents *pay* for the supper! Locusts, indeed! My father pays handsomely for extras and everything, breaking-up party and all; and to be put off with a bun! I think I see myself—I just do! Why"—warming with her theme—"supper is 'alf the fun! There are the crackers and mottoes and jokes, and every one taken down by a gentleman, arm-in-arm. I'll go to supper for one, and stay up to the last. I did not get my new pink dress just to dance with girls, and eat an egg sandwich and go to bed. *Rather* not. Leave it to me, girls"—looking round on her

companions with an air of friendly encouragement—"I shall have a word with Miss Selina. We shall all go to supper, or Isabella Jones will know the reason why."

"Oh, you dear, good Izzy!" cried two voices simultaneously. And one continued, "You know you can do anything with Snappy, and if *you* ask, it will be all right. But about partners, I am afraid they will be few and far between; Snappy and Miss Harper keep the best for themselves and their friends. Anything is good enough for the girls. Last time I was thankful to dance all night with a little boy in a jacket; however, it was a shade better than sitting-out."

"There are the Wolfertons," observed Flo, "and they generally bring two or three men. Last year there was Mr. Wynne, who was tremendously struck with Madeline." Then raising her voice, "Maddie, do you remember Mr. Wynne? Come over here, and let us see if you are blushing."

"Mr. Wynne, Fred Wolferton's friend!" cried Isabella, with great animation. "He is a barrister, and, of course, without a penny to jingle on a milestone—poor as Job. My father don't approve of my getting to know these paupers. You know I'm an heiress"—giggling—"and father says—"

"Oh, never mind your father!" broke in Flo, rudely. "You need not be alarmed; Mr. Wynne won't look at you as long as Madeline is in the room—and perhaps he may not come. Who else

are invited — the Sangsters, the Wallers, the Rays?"

"All common sort of people," remarked the granddaughter of a baron. "Very worthy in their *way*, and well enough for a girls' school breaking up; but I should not dream of knowing them at home, or of bowing if I met them anywhere;" and she threw up her chin, and looked about her superciliously.

No one combated this dire announcement; they were all a little in awe of Miss De Ville and her ancestors—especially of the one who had fought in Palestine—and they were silent and impressed, being young. At length a word was whispered, which quickly set every tongue wagging. That magic word was "dress." What were they all going to wear? One lacked new shoes, another gloves; a fan was lent—in prospect—in return for good offices in the hair-dressing line. Amid this gabble Isabella's piercing voice was heard high and shrill above all, describing the body of her new pink dress. Madeline had joined the crowd, looking white and cold—and no wonder.

"Keep away your fingers, my dear, if they are sticky," said Flo; "and, by the way, what are you going to adorn yourself in? Your white dress was taken by the Harpies, as most unsuitable to you now."

"I have nothing but my black cashmere," she returned, "and this"—holding out a shabby serge sleeve.

"They really must give you something!" cried Isabella, impressively, "if only for the look of

the thing. For the credit of the establishment, they can't have you appear like an old rag-picker." Madeline colored vividly. "I don't mind giving you a dress myself, if you will take it."

"Now, I call that a French compliment, Isabella Jones," remarked Flo, with her usual candor, "and you know it. If Madeline has to wear the old black, so much the worse; but, whatever she wears, she will always look a—*lady*," accompanying the remark with a glance at Miss Jones that gave it point and significance, and made that young person feel that it would be a pleasure to take the big ink-bottle off the chimney-piece and fling it at Florence Blewitt's solid, square-looking head.

"You need not trouble about my dress, Flo, nor need I," said Madeline, trying to find room on the top of the screen for her benumbed fingers. "Miss Selina told me this morning to practice up my dance music. I am to play—"

"Oh, what a shame!" chorused half-a-dozen voices. "Saving the usual piano-player, and a guinea—the skinflints!"

But human nature is human nature, and not a few of these fair creatures felt a conviction that Madeline and her pretty face were best at the piano—turned toward the wall—and that it was only fair to give others a chance, meaning their sweet, unsophisticated selves. They had a very distinct vision of the benefit that would accrue to them as a result of this economical arrangement on the part of the Harpers.

"But what will Mr. Wynne do?" inquired Miss De Ville, with the corners of her mouth drawn down.

She was a tall, pale, sandy-haired girl, with white lashes and a scornful countenance. Madeline's eyes flashed. She was on the point of answering, but the words were taken out of her mouth by Flo, who replied:

"He will dance with you instead, my dear."

"You know we are not allowed to talk about gentlemen," put in a prim girl, with very prominent teeth and a painfully stiff white collar.

"Bosh!" exclaimed Isabella. "I'll talk of whom *I* please, from the old gentleman upward. I'll talk of Mr. Wynne, Mr. Wolferton, Mr. Lancy, Mr. Sangster, Mr. Summers, Mr. Ferraby, Mr. Armstrong—"

"*Young ladies!*" said an awful voice that made them all start, and fall away from the fender like a flock of frightened sheep. "What vulgarity is *this?* How often have I told you that I highly disapprove of such conversation! It will come to this, I see"—looking severely around—"you will have no half-hour after tea if you cannot be trusted. I am exceedingly displeased and shocked, especially"—seizing on her scapegoat—"with you, Madeline West. You are old enough to know better, and to have some influence; and to find you in the very middle of all this unladylike chatter, discussing gentlemen, is really too odious. A girl in your position might have a *little* decency and self-respect. I am extremely disgusted with you. Now go; it is quite

time the little Smiths were in bed. How is it that you have always to be *reminded* of your duties?" she concluded venomously.

Madeline opened her mouth to speak.

"No answer; you know the rule. Now, young ladies, light the gas, and get to your work."

A great commotion and bustle ensued. Exit Madeline, trying vainly to keep back her tears, and with a burning sense of injustice in her breast. Indeed, for once, she forgot herself, and slammed the door—not violently, but still with a decided touch of temper. It was a foolish impulse, foolishly indulged.

She was called back, and imperatively desired to "remember who she was, and to walk out of the room quietly, and close the door after her in a ladylike and becoming manner."

So even this slight safety-valve for her feelings was denied to her, and she left the apartment for a second time completely crushed.

CHAPTER III

THE BREAKING-UP DANCE

THE great day of breaking-up dawned at last. What preparations were made! A cartload of hired chairs for the company was the first arrival; then a consignment of glass and crockery, baskets of hot-house flowers from the friends of wealthy pupils, and finally, in a confectioner's van—the *supper!* Mrs. Harper, her cap askew, her curls bristling, was nearly crazy with excitement and fuss. The Misses Harper were busy, important, and dangerous to accost. The girls, from an early tea, had retired upstairs to indulge in the next best amusement to dancing—dressing. Oh, with what leisurely enjoyment were heads tired, white dresses donned, and gloves drawn on! How often was the following artful query put with an artless air:

"You are looking awfully nice, dear! Now, tell me candidly, what do you think of *me?*"

Madeline had no trouble with her toilet. The black high-necked day-gown, with a white fichu and lace ruffles, was all the embellishment within

her power; but she was in much request, and very busy dressing and decorating her more fortunate schoolfellows. The bell rang. Down they all trooped, conscious, conceited, coquettish, or careless, and filed past Miss Selina, who held a full-dress inspection in the hall—Miss Selina, whose face was flushed to the hue of her new crimson silk, flushed to a shade that set pearl powder at defiance, and scorned the application of Rowland's Kalydor. The young ladies passed muster creditably—with some few exceptions, such as "Minnie, your dress is too short;" "Fanny, those flowers are frightful!" "Jocelyn, where did you get such horrible gloves?" The bevy of fair creatures passed into the schoolroom, where, on a raised platform, were seats for the chorus, two pianos, a harmonium—in short, all the preparations for a concert, the one drawback to the young ladies' absolute felicity—that is to say, those young ladies who were compelled to perform, and who now awaited the audience in a kind of cold shiver, with clammy hands and quickly pulsing hearts. Presently Herr Kroot arrived in elaborate evening dress, frilled shirt, white gloves, and an immense accession of dignity, and talked and scolded, commanded and encouraged, his miserable pupils. Much as they dreaded the audience, they were trebly afraid of him, and dared not break down with his eye upon them, his hand turning over the leaves, his low "counting" in their ears. The large room filled soon, and filled fast, with day boarders, their friends, parents, a few outsiders, and the Misses

Harper's own circle—chiefly clerical. There was quite a notable sprinkling of the sterner sex, for Mrs. Harper's establishment was reported to include some beauties. Very nice, indeed, the young people looked from the body of the concert hall, so young and fresh and fair in their simple white dresses, with their downcast eyes—that noted everything all the same. Among other facts, they noted the arrival of all the Wolfertons and Mr. Wynne, whose presence on the occasion Miss Selina attributed solely to her own attractions. She was fourteen years older than him, but what of that? He was old for his age, and she was young for hers. She flattered herself that in a becoming dress, by lamplight, or behind a spotted veil, she did not look a day more than s even-and-twenty. By all accounts Mr. Wynne was a briefless barrister (but then Selina's share of the family stocking was by no means contemptible), he had the reputation of being clever, and would "get on" of course. The Wolfertons declared that he was highly thought of as a rising man, and of fine old family—but poor. Strange that he should come to the breaking-up this year, too—"made quite a point of it," Amy Wolferton had whispered, and Amy had looked as if she would have liked to have added more.

As he pressed her hand, and she glanced at him from under her scanty eyelashes, a delicious conviction assured Miss Selina that he had not forgotten her—their charming walk from church, or the little picnic party, at which he had sat be-

side her, and when the second supply of plates had failed, and with regard to the remains of some cold chicken, said in the most marked manner, "Miss Selina, will you permit me to lay my bones beside yours?" What was this but a proposal? Certainly in a novel form, unquestionably it meant that they would share the same grave. It was a distinct invitation to the family vault of the blue-blooded Wynnes. How agreeable he was—these barristers always were! How good-looking! What a contrast to Mr. Murphy, the red-haired Irish curate, on whom, with his loud, rich brogue, her sister Letitia had built her hopes matrimonial (N.B. and it had been building on a quicksand), casting a contemptuous glance at the well-oiled red head to her left.

These complacent reflections were chasing each other through the good lady's brain as she sat in the attitude of solicitous attention during the opening cantata. A shrewd, keen, calculating woman with regard to every-day matters, such as school accounts, butchers' bills, extras, and with a lynx eye for the failings and shortcomings of her flock, but where vanity whispered, and a possible (or impossible) husband loomed on her horizon, Miss Selina was a completely different character, and an absolute fool, as giddy, as credulous, as feather-headed as any of the young ladies meekly facing her behind these sheets of music—nay, worse, for has not every one heard the proverb—"There is no fool like an old one?" Far-seeing, crafty girls were clever enough to discover Miss Selina's weak side, and to use their

discovery to their own advantage. They plied her with compliments, ludicrously inappropriate. They called her "their own beautiful Miss Selina," hinted that she had only to come, to be seen, and to conquer, etc.; the result being that these wise young virgins were frequently invited to tea in the drawing-room, to supper in Mrs. Harper's own private refectory, were taken to concerts, were "let off" on various occasions, and laughed at "Old Selina" (or Snappy) in their sleeve; called her a ridiculous goose, as ugly as sin, and as vain as a peacock.

It is necessary to reveal the younger Miss Harper in her true colors in order to explain how a woman in her position could imagine for a moment that a young man would fall in love with her elderly charms, in spite of the overwhelming advantages possessed by at least twenty young rivals—her own pupils. She had long regarded the girls *en masse* as her natural enemies, not as pretty creatures of from sixteen to eighteen years of age, with bright eyes, brilliant complexions, and angelic dispositions! She ticketed them in her own mind as disagreeable female children, with loud voices, voracious appetites, and sly ways. Nevertheless, she was reluctantly aware that Madeline could be no longer considered a child, that some people considered her appearance pleasing! She stared hard at her now, where her black dress made a sort of blot among the snowy gowns of the first trebles. What a color! was she rouged? She looked just like a doll. Doll or no doll, Miss Selina made a men-

tal note that she should not be of the happy band who were going into supper. She might be getting ideas into her mind—foolish ideas. People perhaps would notice her, as they had done last year, and turn her giddy head. The cantata came to a satisfactory conclusion. A fierce, tempestuous bravura, performed with desperate energy by a long-fingered young lady, succeeded it. Poor girl! she was trembling with terror as she sat down. What with the audience before her, and Herr Kroot behind her, she occupied the proverbial situation of being between the devil and the deep sea, and played with a courage that was absolutely reckless.

The bravura was followed by a duet, the duet by a violin solo, then one or two songs. With regard to the last of these, the miserable performer found her feelings quite too overpowering, and after some gurgling in the throat, and sniffing in her handkerchief, she collapsed into floods of tears, and was briskly hustled into the background and hidden behind the others, while, at a moment's notice, Madeline West was commanded to take her place and step into the gap.

Poor Madeline! It had not been intended that she should perform. She had no friends among the audience; no complacent relations to clap their hands and look proud and important. When the last words of "A Finland Love Song" had died away in silence—a silence caused by surprise and emotion—there was a pause of a full minute, and then a tremendous hurricane of applause burst forth. Ladies winked away unaccustomed

tears, and clapped in a manner that was trying to their new ten-button gloves; their hearts were moved for the moment; some chord had been touched by that fresh young voice, by those sympathetic words, a chord that vibrated, and woke up old memories of the days when *they* were young—those days so sad, so sweet, that were no more.

The men encored tumultuously, not only because the singer had a lovely voice, and sang from her very heart, but—oh, well, because men will be men, and because the girl in black was uncommonly pretty. "Auld Robin Gray" was vociferously commanded, but the fair vocalist was adamant; she only curtseyed timidly, and curtseyed again. No one but herself had seen Miss Selina's emphatic shake of the head, as she met her cold gray eye in that "little look across the crowd." No, there was to be no encore.

After the concert, the room was cleared for dancing, and Madeline took up her post at the best (the drawing-room) piano and played first a set of lancers, to set every one going, and to polish off the dowagers and duty dances, and then a waltz—and yet another waltz. It was very dull work for her. She was placed with her back to the company, and could neither see nor be seen—which was precisely what Miss Selina had intended; but the pretty singer was not to be so easily concealed. More than one would-be partner vainly begged for an introduction. More than one crafty young man pleaded *fatigue*, and halted long in the neighborhood of

the piano, where he could obtain a good view of the charming *pianiste*. After the third waltz, played by Madeline's weary fingers, Mr. Wynne approached, and said, as she stood up selecting the next piece on the programme—

"Miss West, we have all to thank you for your capital playing," holding out his hand as he spoke. "And now I hope you will give me the pleasure of this dance?" She touched his hand timidly, and shook her head. "Oh! I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed, with a quick glance at her black dress. "Let me, at least, take you to the tea-room. You must want some refreshment after your exertions."

"No, thank you very much," she answered, once more seating herself at the instrument. "I have had my tea!"

"You don't mean to say that you are going to play again?" he asked, in a tone of indignant astonishment.

"Yes, I am going to play all the evening," she replied, turning over the leaves and finding the place, with a considerably heightened color.

"But last year you danced all the evening. What does it mean?"

"It means, Mr. Wynne, that I was then one of the boarders; now, I am only a pupil-teacher. Circumstances are changed; it is my duty to play—and," faltering slightly, "I like it."

"I find it difficult to believe that, Miss West," he exclaimed; "but I suppose I must endeavor to do so. Will you permit me to turn over the leaves?"

"No, no!" she protested eagerly; "on no account. You must dance."

"'Je n'en vois pas la necessite,'" he quoted, seating himself deliberately as he spoke. "I am afraid you have lost a relative," he continued, in a lower voice. "Your father?"

"I have in one sense," now striking up another waltz. "My father has not been heard of for a whole year and a half. When last he wrote he had lost a great deal of money. He was always a speculator. He has never written since—" She paused expressively.

"And have you no friend or relation in this country?"

"No, none that I have any claim upon. I have been at school here since I was seven years old."

"And, good heavens! you don't mean to tell me that you have no resource but to remain on here as pupil-teacher?"

"No other. You see I have no home in this country. I had one long ago in Melbourne—the only one I ever knew."

"Do you remember it?" he asked rather abstractedly.

"Yes, I remember the big white house and the bright, sunny climate."

"Has your father never come home to see you all these years?"

"Never! I'm afraid — I'm afraid—" She paused, unable to articulate, but her fingers still played steadily on.

"*I'm* afraid," he said in a low voice, bending

forward, "that you are not happy here," contrasting rapidly in his own mind the brilliant figure she had made last year, as the belle of the evening, the cynosure of all eyes, to what she now appeared, the poor piano-playing drudge, not so much as rewarded with a "thank you," and dressed in a gown that even *he* could see was shabby and old-fashioned.

"Oh, Mr. Wynne!" said a sprightly staccato voice at his elbow. "Oh! you naughty man! Why are you not dancing? Come away; I cannot have you distracting Miss West's attention, you dreadful person! We are going to have another set of lancers, and you shall be *my* partner."

With this heavy bribe, he was summarily detached from his post by the piano, and carried off by the triumphant Miss Selina (swearing to himself, despite a smiling countenance). Madeline played and played, until she felt that her fingers had no feeling, and were just as stiff and mechanical as the teeth in a musical-box. At length supper released her. She stood up, half expectant, as the others flocked past two and two, each happy girl provided with a cavalier—beaming, giggling, blushing, as the case might be! While she waited, a bony, much-beringed hand was laid heavily upon her shoulder, and she beheld Miss Selina, who had arrested Mr. Wynne.

"Madeline, my dear," she whispered, "I am sorry there is no room for you. I'll send you out a sandwich, or something." And then she passed on, leaving poor Madeline alone in that

big empty room, with a lump in her throat and tears in her eyes.

Miss West was occasionally foolish enough to cut off her nose to spite her face, and she indignantly declined the subsequent sandwich brought in on a plate by the sympathetic parlor-maid, who vowed "it was a shame," but met with no encouragement to relieve her mind further on the subject.

Madeline knew that she dared not go to bed. She had still to play—"it was in the bond." So she had not even that small comfort; nor might she, as yet, indulge herself in the further luxury of a thoroughly good cry.

"What a difference money makes!" she said to herself bitterly. "What a contrast between this night and last year! Who would have believed—I, least of all—that that night twelve months I should be sitting here alone? However, I don't suppose," she added, half aloud, with a catch in her voice, "that any one misses me."

In this supposition she was wrong. Many people missed the girl in black, who had sung *the* song of the concert, who had played unremittingly all the evening, and who had such a shabby dress, and such a sweetly pretty face!

Not a few of Mrs. Harper's guests, who were eating her good things and sipping her champagne, were registering a black mark against her all the same, and thinking that they would be sorry if any friend of *theirs* had to fill the post of her present "pupil-teacher."

Mr. Wynne dissembled—as they used to say in good old melodramas—and was most agreeable to his partner, Miss Selina, but inwardly he was raging. With professional cleverness he drew her out, and cross-examined her with regard to Miss West, and she—her tongue unloosened by two glasses of champagne, her vanity stimulated by his attentions (to her plate)—was completely off her guard, and as easily turned inside-out as any quaking witness at the Old Bailey.

She expounded eloquently on Mr. West's enormities, the vast sums expended on his daughter, the fact that "but for them she would be friendless and homeless—probably begging from door to door. The wretched swindler was dead, the girl had no relatives or friends, and only for their charity—" Here she paused impressively, expecting Mr. Wynne to fill up the blank, with some neat and appropriate speech; but, for once, she was doomed to disappointment.

"Only for your charity she would be a governess, would she not?" he remarked carelessly. "With such musical talents she is sure of a lucrative situation—a hundred or so a year. But, of course, under *your* roof she has all that she can wish for—a happy home, among her old companions—and any one can see with half an eye that Mrs. Harper is a mother to her," he concluded with immovable features.

Miss Selina started and became of a yet richer shade of crimson. This idea of a governess, at one hundred pounds a year, was something en-

tirely novel. The girl was clever and accomplished! Was Mr. Wynne speaking ironically, when he alluded to a mother's care and a happy home? Impossible! his face was as unmoved, his eyes as smiling, his manner as sociable and friendly as usual. It was a wild, foolish idea, and she immediately dismissed it from her mind, and plunged into a discussion on platonic friendships—and a second helping of a most excellent truffle.

Mr. Wynne managed to have a few words with Mrs. Wolferton after supper. He stated his case concisely, pointed out Miss West, and strongly commended her to the kind lady's notice. Mrs. Wolferton was the mother of Fred (Mr. Wynne's schoolfellow, college friend, and chum), and was very fond of Laurence, whom she had known from the time when he was an audacious boy in jacket upward. As she listened to the sorry history of pretty Miss West, her motherly heart was touched, and she immediately begged to be introduced to her.

"Remembered her well," she declared, "from last year. Hoped she would come and see her during the holidays." And, finally, being a woman who believed in deeds as well as *words*, took off her gloves, removed a jingling bracelet, and seated herself at the piano for the remainder of the night, in spite of Mrs. Harper's horrified face and excited expostulations, saying pleasantly to Madeline, "Now, my dear, my dancing days are over; yours are just beginning. Go and

dance, Laurence; Miss West has not danced a step this evening."

The hint was superfluous. Already Laurence and Miss West were at the other end of the room, and already a very portentous frown had settled deep on Miss Selina's brow; but it availed nothing. The two offenders were dauntless.

Mr. Wynne was a capital partner. He introduced Madeline to various others, who voted the girl in black quite the prettiest they had seen for months, and who were the more eager to make her acquaintance, and to dance with her, from seeing that their attentions were palpably displeasing to the Harper family. Madeline danced until the end of the evening, although Miss Selina had hissed into her ear, as she stood near her, "You are a bold, pushing, unladylike girl."

She knew she would have to pay dearly for these present delights on the morrow, and was resolved to drain the cup of pleasure—yes, to the very dregs! She looked supremely lovely, if slightly defiant; the exercise of dancing had made her eyes brighter, her color deeper. Mr. Wynne told himself that she was the prettiest—ay, and the nicest—girl he had ever met in the whole course of his life; but he must not lose his head—no, a briefless barrister could not afford to fall in love with a penniless pupil-teacher!

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CHAPTER IV

THE LAST TRAIN

THE holidays commenced. The young ladies went north, south, east, and west, to their several homes, and Madeline had the whole big schoolroom, and the much-disputed fire, absolutely to herself. She was monarch of all she surveyed, but she was nearly as lonely as Robinson Crusoe on the desert island. The Misses Harper were not covetous of her company; nor was she ever bidden to the friendly luncheons or the merry little suppers which repeatedly took place. She, on these occasions, enjoyed (?) a plate of cold meat, or bread and butter, and a glass of water in the privacy of the schoolroom. There was no necessity, the Misses Harper avered, to introduce her to their friends. It would be a mistake to spoil her; she was quite conceited enough. But Mrs. Wolferton had no such scruples: she called, she wrote, she persevered, she carried her point. She insisted on having Miss West to spend an occasional day with her. What a contrast to the schoolroom at Harperton House that

dainty drawing-room, with its mirrors, pictures, easy-chairs, Persian carpets, exotic flowers, and genial Mrs. Wolferton knitting and talking and begging her "to make herself at home." Then there was a tempting luncheon, a drive, a sociable dinner—which included Fred Wolferton, Mr. Wynne, and one or two others—finally, music and round games, in the midst of which would come the disagreeable announcement—"A servant for Miss West, if you please." Fred Wolferton and Mr. Wynne invariably escorted her home all the same, leaving her on Mrs. Harper's spotless doorstep; but not coming in, nor making any move in that direction—as Miss Selina angrily remarked from behind the drawing-room blind. Miss Selina had become very "cold" in her manner to Madeline—in fact, she was more than cold: she was actually and actively hostile—and glared at the unlucky pupil-teacher as if she were some kind of poisonous domestic reptile she had nourished in her bosom. Mrs. Wolferton's praise, Mrs. Wolferton's partiality for Miss West, did not please her; but, happily, the old lady was going away to the south of France to escape the east winds, and when she returned she would probably have forgotten her passing fancy! Miss Selina was good enough to judge others by her own standard.

One day there came tickets for the Theater Royal at Riverside, for Mrs. and the Misses Harper, and Miss West; with Mr. Fred Wolferton's compliments. He had not left home—and Mr. Wynne was still his guest.

"To go, or not to go!" that was a question which was debated with great spirit in Mrs. Harper's own bedroom. They were only too willing to accept with pleasure; but what about that girl—*must* they take her also? There was no other alternative. If she had only a slight cold, or even a sty on her eye; but, unfortunately, she was never better in her life. They had no excuse beyond their own disinclination; go she must. Very grudgingly they broke the news to Madeline, as she sat over a slacked-down fire in the schoolroom, dividing her thoughts between a child's story-book and Mr. Wynne—needless to ask which had the largest share. She could not help thinking a good deal of Mr. Wynne. It was wrong, it was foolish! Miss Selina would have declared that it was indelicate! Probably he never gave *her* a second thought. Her cheeks grew hot at the idea; but an inward voice whispered another tale. If he did not think of her, why did he always monopolize her at Mrs. Wolferton's, usurping Fred's place at the piano, why sit beside her at cards? Why had he begged permission to keep a flower? Why had he hinted that only for his poverty he would marry—or, at least, ask some girl to marry him—a girl who had no home? Who could that be? Dare she breathe, even to her inmost soul, that the girl's name was Madeline West? If he had not thought of her, why did he tell her so much about himself, his dead father and mother, his rich, high, and mighty relations: relations who looked upon empty pockets as a crime; but who patronized

passionately. "How dare you? How dare you say such things? You know they are not true. I went to Mrs. Wolferton's because she was kind —because she asked me. I never ran after Mr. Wynne—never!"

"And pray what are you doing to-night?" with grim, ironical interrogation.

"If you think that I am running after him in going to the theater, I can easily remain at home. I"—(oh, what a wrench was this! but her pride was roused)—"will stay at home," removing her hat as she spoke. "The matter is easily settled."

Not so easily as she supposed, for at this moment the sound of loud, cheery, masculine voices in the hall broke in upon them. The door was flung wide; enter Fred Wolferton, Mr. Murphy —(hush! you must not tell the bishop!) an elderly escort for Mrs. Harper; last, not least, Mr. Wynne. And although Madeline, with considerable embarrassment, firmly and positively assured every one that "she was not going," as she could offer no sane reason for her sudden announcement, and was unquestionably dressed for the theater, public opinion and public clamor carried the day.

She replaced her hat, in answer to an impatient signal from Miss Selina, and went; but the gilt had been removed from the gingerbread, and all the way in the train—they were ten miles from Riverside—she was pale and silent, and pointedly avoided Mr. Wynne, to Miss Selina's great content. However, Mr. Wynne declined

to be avoided. He ignored Miss Selina's hints, and the vacant place next to her, which she patted invitingly, as much as to say, "Come and sit here, and be happy!" and seated himself at the other side of Madeline, whose eyes were straying over the theater, and who, once the overture commenced, began to realize that she was enjoying herself extremely, and would not allow Miss Selina's dreadful insinuations to spoil her whole evening.

Miss Selina, with tightly compressed lips and an angry glare in her little gray eyes, was aware that she had been publicly slighted. What is that line about "A woman scorned?" She felt capable of anything. Her rage against Mr. Wynne was as hot and as consuming as her bitter jealousy of Madeline West. Well, they should suffer for their intolerable behavior, as she called it, meaning the simple fact of their sitting together, talking with much animation between the acts, and looking supremely happy. Yes, her feelings must have immediate relief. She would find a way to punish them; and, as she sat silent, her eyes fixed upon the drop scene, she was revolving a portentous plan in her own mind—a scheme that would rid her of her ex-pupil, and avenge her on the rising barrister by one swift blow—a scheme that would not be for the benefit of the smiling young couple—no, quite the reverse.

The orchestra was playing a wild Polish dance, its burden full of sadness, despair, and weird, fantastic chords at one period; at another gayly

frolicsome, and full of outbursts of mad mirth—an air that exercised a strange influence upon them, especially on Madeline, in her present state of highly strung nerves and repressed mental excitement. She drank in that wild melody; it haunted her as long as she lived. When heard among other scenes, it always recalled this night—this momentous night, the very crisis of her existence. She gazed at the stage, at the big, red, mysterious curtain, the bent figures in the orchestra, the florally ornamented theater, the gay company, with fans and opera-glasses, and asked herself, "Was it all real?"

At last the play was over; the actors had been called before the footlights and vociferously applauded, and had bowed themselves away. And now people began to move, to look about for cloaks and wraps and overcoats, and to hurry off, as if the place was on fire! The crowd was great. Outside it was snowing hard, and inside the crush was almost suffocating.

"I'll look after you, Miss West," said Mr. Wynne, eagerly, as they found a footing in the passage among hundreds of the recent audience.

"Very well. Be sure you *do!*" put in Miss Selina, with unwonted briskness. "We are certain to get separated. Look here, Madeline"—lowering her voice suddenly—"meet us at the bottom of the station steps. *You* know the place. Mind you are not late; it's the last train!"

And with this injunction on her lips, she was borne away in the crowd, in her smart, pink

opera mantle—once the property of the rich Miss West—and soon lost to sight.

"Let us wait until the rush is over, and take it quietly," said Wynne, struggling vainly to look at his watch. "We will get a hansom, and be at the station in no time—before them, ten to one—for they are a large party."

Inwardly he marveled at Miss Selina's arrangement. He was not aware that she had her reasons—well-thought-out plans—and he was too well satisfied to question the matter. After a little, when the crush had lessened, he made his way down to the portico, secured a hansom, and drove with his charge to the place of rendezvous, the foot of the steps—a covered entry, luckily, for the snow was falling thick and fast. They waited—it was bitterly cold—a chill little wind rose, and sobbed and wailed round them. Five minutes, and no one came to meet them. Ten minutes! still no one, and the hurrying crowd that had passed up had now entirely ceased.

"I hope they have not come to grief!" said Wynne. And, suddenly looking at his watch, he added, "I'll tell you what—we can't wait any longer, or we will miss our train. We must run for it as it is," springing quickly up the steps.

Too late! Too late! The red light of the last train to Streambridge was just disappearing into the big tunnel. What was to be done? He stood for a moment irresolute. Yes; it was the last train, and it was gone. A cab was the first idea. Leaving Madeline, who was benumbed with waiting, and a good deal frightened, he

hurried to the cab-rank. It was empty and void. He waylaid a passing cabby, and told him the state of the case.

"Ten miles in deep snow! Couldn't be done, sir, at no price."

The same story was repeated elsewhere. There was nothing for it but to go back to Madeline, who was now shivering over the dying fire in the ladies' waiting-room.

"Well?" she asked, raising her face expectantly.

"No cab to be had," he rejoined, with assumed *sangfroid*.

"No cab to be had!" she repeated, her eyes darkening and dilating with horror. "Oh, Mr. Wynne, can we walk?" Mad project!

"No. I fancy the best thing will be to stop here all night—I mean at the Railway Hotel—and go on by the first train in the morning. I will go to the landlady and ask her to look after you, and I will find quarters elsewhere. It will be all right," he continued reassuringly. "Are you certain that Miss Selina said the *foot* of the steps?" he asked, as if struck by an afterthought.

"Yes; quite certain," resolutely.

"Here!" he called to a sleepy porter. "Did you see a party looking for people by the last train—three ladies and three gentlemen?"

"Yes, sir; stout old party and two elderly ladies"--(oh, ye gods! if the Misses Harper had heard him!)—"three gents. They came by the West Street entrance; they *did* seem looking—

that is, the gents was—but one of the ladies said you were all right, and bundled the whole pack into a carriage. She seemed in a terrible flurry."

"Well, we can do no good by waiting here," said Wynne, at length. "Come along, there is nothing to be frightened at, Miss West." (Miss West was crying quietly, and very much alarmed indeed.) "You will be back in time for breakfast. It was all an accident—a misunderstanding, and if there is any one to blame, or to be blamed, you must blame *me*."

"I know they will be awfully angry," said Madeline, turning her white face to his. "I don't know *what* they will say!"

"Not angry, when I have explained everything to their entire satisfaction. I will go security that you will not get into any trouble. I will see Mrs. Harper myself."

And, really, half an hour later, as Madeline sat with her feet on the fender of a luxurious bedroom in the Railway Hotel—a magnificent apartment to her benighted eyes—with a hot coal fire before her and a cup of steaming coffee in her hand, she began to cheer up, and to take a brighter view of the situation. What harm was it, after all? Missing a train—nothing so very dreadful. She would only get a scolding at the worst. Alas! she was but too well accustomed to scoldings!

But Laurence Wynne, as he fought his way to another hotel though the soft, spongy snow, with the collar of his coat turned up, and his head bent against the stinging sleet, looked

graver than he had done when he was talking to his late companion. It was an exceedingly awkward business, and he had an uncomfortable conviction that Miss Selina was at the bottom of the situation. She had sent them to one entrance, and arrived at the other herself; had requested them to wait—and miss the train. There had been an expression in her eye that was distinctly hostile, as he had suddenly encountered it over the top of her fan. Selina Harper meant mischief—had laid a neat little trap into which he had artlessly tumbled. "However," he said to himself, as he entered the coffee-room of a palatial hotel, "half the evils in the world are those which have never happened. No doubt the worst of the adventure would merely resolve itself into a bad quarter of an hour—for him—with Mrs. Harper."

CHAPTER V

EXPELLED

THE next morning, leaving Madeline at the station to follow by a later train, Mr. Wynne called at Harperton, in order to have a little explanation. The maid's face (she was an old maid) looked portentously solemn as she opened the door; and—oh! ominous objects!—two good-sized basket trunks, and a bonnet-box, stood waiting in the hall. As he glanced at them in passing, some one came out through a door just behind him, and said, in a biting tone—

"Dear me! I am surprised to see Mr. Wynne under the circumstances; but, as he is here, perhaps he can give an address for Miss West's boxes?"

"May I ask what you mean, Miss Selina?" he said, turning to confront her the instant the drawing-room door was closed.

"I mean," she replied, flushing to a dull brick color, "that after her escapade of last evening, Miss West never enters this house again—a young

lady who stayed out all night!" she concluded with a wild, dramatic gesture.

"But, you know, that was not her fault, Miss Selina. We waited exactly where you told us—at the bottom of the steps—and so missed the train. I could not get a cab, though I did my utmost, the snow was too deep. I left Miss West at the Railway Hotel and brought her from there this morning. She—"

"Oh," interrupted his listener, throwing up both hands, "pray spare me the details! It is nothing to me whom she was with or where she went. We have quite done with her. It was a planned thing between you, no doubt."

"Miss Selina," cried Mr. Wynne, "your sex protects you! A man dared not say what you have permitted yourself to utter, and do not in your own heart believe. Am I to understand that because, through waiting for you, by your own express direction, Miss West lost her only train home last night, and was obliged to remain in Riverside, you would blast her reputation and thrust her out of doors?"

"You are!" she returned, defiantly, looking him full in the face with her cold, cruel, little eyes.

"And may I ask what is to become of the young lady?" he inquired, with a forced calmness that was ominous enough.

"Nay," shrugging her shoulders, "that is a matter between her and you." Then she added, with an evil smile, "She need not refer to us for a character."

"Perhaps your mother will be more lenient," he said, making a great effort to restrain his temper. "Remember that Miss West has no home and no friends. Can I see Mrs. Harper?"

"I am speaking for my mother," she answered sharply. "She refuses to see the girl, or allow her inside our door. There is no use in your persisting—it is waste of time. We are not rich, but, at any rate," choking with excitement, "we have always been respectable!"

"I am delighted to hear it," he replied, making a low, ironical bow; "and as there is nothing further to be said, I will wish you good-morning."

"Good-morning!" replied Miss Selina, ringing the bell, and curtseying simultaneously. "You will be pleased to remove Miss West's boxes at once, and inform her that letters from her will be returned unopened"—thereby securing the last shot, and the last word. And Mr. Wynne walked out of the house in a bewildered and confused state of mind, outwardly cool, but in reality at boiling point.

He had not proceeded far when he met Madeline coming toward him, with a terrified and expectant face. Now was the moment for action. His senses were stung to alertness, his mind cleared of misgivings; he made a desperate resolve. She was thrust out homeless and alone in the wide, wide world! She should share his home, such as it was; it was better than none. She should, and she would, be his wife—and rich in love if in nothing else. Prudence had hitherto

sealed his lips—for her sake chiefly. Now that she had no resources, no place open to receive her, he could and would speak.

The first thing he did was to hail a cab, and dispatch the man straight back to Harperton for Miss West's luggage, desiring him to bring it to the station.

"Why, what does it mean? Are they so very angry?" she asked with blanched cheeks. "Oh, you don't mean that they are sending me away?" For she noticed that Mr. Wynne looked unusually pale and grave.

"Come down here with me," leading her into some public gardens that they were passing, "and I will tell you all about it."

The gardens were miserably wintry. Snow lay on the ground, a couple of boys were snowballing, some starving red-wings fluttered across the path, a granite-gray sky lowered overhead. Surely it was the last place on God's earth in which to relate a love tale; and the girl herself, what a picture of misery! Oh! thought the young man, if Mrs. Wolferton had but been at home—but, alas! she was abroad—she would have been a true friend to this poor forlorn child. Madeline was, of course, wearing her evening dress, such as it was—at any rate, it was thin. A shabby little plush opera cloak barely covered her perishing neck and arms. Over this was drawn a meager black cape. On her head she wore a sunburned sailor hat; in her frozen, mittened hand she held a fan; her face was pinched with cold, and white with anxiety. No lovely

lady fair was here to woo this bleak January forenoon. And what of ambition—the stern, jealous mistress to whom he was pledged?

"They are very angry, senselessly angry," began the young man. "They won't take you back again, and have actually packed your boxes ready for removal. However, when one door shuts, another opens. There is a home ready for you, Madeline. Can you guess where it is?"

She gazed at Mr. Wynne, and stood perfectly still and very white, with her thin, sensitive lips tightly pressed together, and made no reply.

"You know that it is my home," he continued eagerly. "I need not tell you that I love you, and so well do I love you that until now I have never dared even to whisper my love. I am poor, I have my way to make as yet, it may be a life of struggling poverty. Can you share it—will you venture, Madeline?"

The girl stepped back a pace, and suddenly sat down upon an iron garden bench, still silent, and covered her face with her mittened hands.

"Will you not answer me?" he pleaded. He dared not remove her hands, or offer her a caress. The snowballing had ceased; the present scene in real life attracted the two boys, who had drawn near. The lady was sick, or looked like it.

"You do not mean it," she faltered. "I know you are very, very kind, but I cannot accept your pity, for that is what it comes to."

"I solemnly declare to you that it is not," he rejoined with emphasis; "but even if it were,

have you not heard that pity is akin to love?"

"It is utterly impossible," she said slowly. "You are speaking out of the goodness of your heart, on the impulse of the moment. This time yesterday, tell me honestly," raising her lovely eyes to his, "had you any intention of—of—of this?"

"To be truthful, then, I had not."

"There, you see, that is enough. There is your answer," with a quick little gesture.

"No, no, hear me out. It was on your account that I held my tongue. If I had had a decent income I would have spoken to you long ago; but I felt that I had no right to remove you from Mrs. Harper's care without having a comfortable home to offer you. I meant to work very hard and to return next year. Now all has been changed. Circumstances alter cases. I ask you now, Madeline, will you be afraid to begin with me at the bottom of the ladder—something tells me that I shall reach the top?"

"I shall only be a dead weight and a burden," she replied in a broken voice. She was relenting. Her own heart was an eloquent advocate for Mr. Wynne.

"What will your relations say when they hear that you wish to marry a portionless girl, a—beggar?" she murmured tremulously.

"They will say nothing that can affect us. I am independent. I have no claims on them, and they have no right to dictate to me. By the time they hear the news, we shall, I hope, be married.

We have nothing to wait for, and the sooner you have a home of your own the better. I wish I had a sister or some near relative that I could take you to, but I am almost as much alone in the world as you are."

In the end Mr. Wynne prevailed—was not talking his trade!—and Madeline West walked out of that wintry white garden his affianced wife.

Rash young man! Rash young woman! One would have thought that they had the wealth of Crœsus, the full consent and warmest wishes of tribes of wealthy relations, to look at their faces as they passed through the gates side by side.

Miss West did not feel the snow soaking through her thin walking shoes. No, she was treading on air—had thrown all doubts and misgivings to the winds, and was prepared to make the most of this heaven-sent period. She was about to enter on a new and happy life, believing that, although a poor man's wife, her path would be strewn with roses.

She had about as much practical experience of household cares—the value of pounds, shillings, and pence—as one of the children in the third class at Harperton. As for Laurence Wynne, Madeline was his, Madeline was an angel, young, unspoiled, and unsophisticated, with modest wishes, and a firm faith in him. Their future was before them! It was!

CHAPTER VI

"POVERTY COMES IN AT THE DOOR"

In a very short time Madeline West was Madeline Wynne. She was married at a little old church in the City, with no other witnesses than the verger and the clerk; and Mr. and Mrs. Wynne spent a week in Paris ere they set up housekeeping, in modest lodgings not far from the Temple, and from which, by leaning well out of the drawing-room window, and nearly dislocating your neck, you could obtain a glimpse of the Thames Embankment.

The good old days, when Traddles and Sophy lived in chambers, and entertained half-a-dozen of "the dear girls," were no more. Mr. Wynne was obliged to set up his little tent outside the venerable precincts, in the second floor front of Solferino Place. To Madeline it was a palace, because it was her very own. Here she might poke the fire, alter the arrangement of the furni-

ture, pile on coals, order tea at any time, and go out and come in as she pleased. She could scarcely realize such liberty! Neither could she realize her wedding-ring, and she frequently stared for a moment in doubt when she heard herself called "Mrs. Wynne."

Laurence was not so poor as she imagined, for he hired a piano, bought her songs, flowers, and —oh! joy—three such pretty new dresses; he took her to the theaters, for walks in the parks (when he had time), he showed her most of the sights of London—St. Paul's, Westminster Abbey, the National Gallery, and the Tower.

He was even extravagant in one line. He laid out for her a reckless amount of shillings and half-crowns on literary papers, magazines, and books. Laurence was fond of reading; she was not, and she little knew how she startled him when she exclaimed, "Besides all the other hateful things you have delivered me from, Laurence, you have delivered me from *books!* I never wish to open one again!"

Now Laurence had been looking forward to introducing his pretty Madeline to all the great masters in English literature, to hearing her fresh comments, to sharing her raptures, to comparing first impressions, favorite pieces, favorite characters; in short, to opening for this girl of eighteen the portals of a new world. Alas! it soon became evident that Madeline had an absolute lack of literary taste. She had a taste for music, for flowers; a marvelous taste in colors, and in dress; but for reading, as he understood

it, not an atom. (At first he had had visions of reading her some sketches and articles of his own, but soon changed his mind, and kept his MS. in his writing-desk.) He read aloud well, and selected, as he believed, gems; but, unfortunately, Mrs. Wynne preferred paste!

Lamb's essays were "quite too awfully dry." Wordsworth was ten times worse—she could hardly stifle her yawns. And even when he was reading "Silas Marner," and, as he considered, George Eliot's masterpiece, he noticed that Madeline was shyly perusing the advertisements in a ladies' newspaper. She looked so nonplused and unhappy if he paused and suddenly asked her, "If that was not fine? and how such and such a passage struck her?"

At length he relinquished his efforts. It was time, when Madeline, with a pretty pout, said, "My dear Laurence, I might as well be at school; you are just talking like Mr. Falk, our professor of English literature. Such an ugly little mummy."

"And to whom you never listened?"

"Not I; and I never could remember names, periods, or dates. You must make the best of me. In some ways you will find that I am hopelessly stupid."

In spite of these tiresome readings, Madeline was thoroughly happy; there was not one single drawback, not one little cloud on her sky, if we except an occasionally heavy magazine article to which she was obliged to lend her ears. And Laurence was happy, too. It was delightful to

come home those dark, wet nights, and find a kiss, a blazing fire, and his pretty Madeline awaiting him. She was always smiling, always so ready to see the comic side of everything, a veritable sunbeam in that drawing-room.

"Who would be a bachelor?" he asked himself contemptuously, as he watched her flitting to and fro after dinner, pulling up his armchair and filling his pipe. If he had one little *arrière pensee* it was this, that she would not *always* give him mutton chops, and a wish that her ideas of a *menu* were a little more expansive.

Nevertheless he was perfectly content. He had an incentive to work hard now, and he did work. He was getting known in a small way. He had the gift of oratory, of what is known as legal tact, a handsome presence, and the power —given to so few—of swaying men's minds with his eloquence, as the flame of a candle in the wind. But, then, he was only twenty-eight—a mere boy in the eyes of the ancient profession, where a man begins to make a start about fifty. Still Laurence Wynne had his foot on the lower rung of the ladder. More than one shrewd solicitor had noted him. His luck had turned; his marriage had brought him good fortune, though it had scared away all his relations, and he had completely dropped out of society.

But this fool's Paradise was not to last—it never does. The angel that opened the gate, and drove the foolish pair out into the everyday, hard, stony world was typhoid fever.

The hot summer succeeding their marriage

was a trying one, and in the sultry September days typhoid fever laid hold on many victims, among others on the hard working young barrister—seized him with a death-like grip, flung him on a sick bed, and kept him there for months.

The fever was so difficult to shake off, and it had brought so many other ills in its train. Finances were low—as they are sure to be when the bread-winner is idle. Doctors' bills and chemists' bills were mounting up, as well as the butcher's and baker's, not to speak of the landlady's little account.

All the burden now lay upon one pair of young shoulders—Madeline's; and, to quote a homely but expressive phrase, she absolutely did not know where to turn. She had neither money nor friends. Her husband had no capital; his slender fortune had been invested in his education and profession. And as to his friends and his distant connections, they had disowned him. When they had heard of what they were good enough to call "his low marriage with a teacher in a school," they had washed their hands of him with wonderful unanimity. Society had lost sight of him for months; Mr. and Mrs. Wynne had no acquaintances. Poor Madeline was in terrible straits, but her courage rose with the occasion; she was brave and energetic, and did not sit down with her hands before her and cry.

A schoolfellow of her husband's (another young barrister) came to see her and him, and gave help in the shape of advice which for once

was valuable. They moved to the top story—the attics. (That was a step of which their landlady highly approved.) And he procured some law copying for Madeline—who wrote a clear, neat hand—which brought in a few shillings, and kept the actual wolf from the door. He sent fish, grapes, and other little delicacies to the invalid, and was in truth that *rara avis*—a friend in need.

He considered that Wynne had behaved like a madman in marrying on nothing; but certainly the girl was an immense temptation—so young, so pretty—such eyes he had never seen—so unsophisticated and fresh, and yet possessing excellent sense and an elastic and dauntless spirit. Here for once was an instance in which poverty had not thrust love out of the window. Strange, but true, their reverses had only served to draw the Wynnes more closely together. They afforded a refreshing study to Mr. Jessop, who was a cynic and a philosopher in a small way, and who sneered and snarled and marveled. Things had not even come to the worst with these unfortunate people, not until a third was added to the establishment in the shape of a Master Wynne, who puckered up his wrinkled red face, thrust his creasy fists into his eyes, and made hideous grimaces at the world in which he found himself—and in which, to tell the truth, he was not particularly wanted, except by his mother, to whom he was not only welcome, but, in her partial eyes, a little household god!

His father, who was slowly recovering—an

emaciated specter of what he had been—was dubious with regard to the striking resemblance to himself, and frequently wondered in his inmost soul as to what was to be the future of his son and heir? How was he to be fed, clothed, and educated? Dismal echoes answered, "How?" for the Wynnes were now desperately poor.

I mean by this, that Mr. Wynne's watch had long been ticketed in a pawn-broker's window, that Madeline's one little brooch had gone the same way; also—oh, breathe it not!—her best gown and hat; also Mr. Wynne's topcoat and evening dress clothes; that the invalid alone tasted meat—and in scanty portions—Madeline telling many clever fibs with regard to her own dinner. Her inexhaustible spirits and vivacity seemed to sustain her—that, and a little bread and tea.

The one person who was well-to-do was the baby. He was clothed in a beautiful cloak and hood—Mr. Jessop's gifts—purchased, with many blushes, by that keen-eyed, close-shaven gentleman, and presented with pride to his godson and namesake. More than once Madeline's mental eye had seen these sumptuous garments smuggled away to the pawnbroker's round the corner, but she fought hard with the idea, and had sternly kept it at bay—as yet. Their circumstances were, indeed, all but desperate, when one evening Mr. Jessop came thundering up the stairs, newspaper in hand, and panted out, as he threw himself into the nearest chair and took off his hat—

"I say, Mrs. Wynne, what was your name before you were married?"

"My name," she echoed, looking blankly at him, for she was trying to keep the baby quiet and to do some copying simultaneously—vain and exasperating task—"was West—Madeline West."

"'Ah! I thought so!" he cried triumphantly, clearing his throat and unfolding his paper with a flourish. "Then just listen to this: 'MADELINE WEST.—If this should meet the eye of Madeline Sidney West, she is earnestly implored to communicate with Mrs. H. of H. House, at once, when she will hear of something greatly to her advantage.' Now what do you think of that?" he demanded of his friend, who, drawn up near a handful of cinders, had been poring over a law book. "Looks like a legacy, doesn't it?"

"Too good to be true, I'm afraid. Eh, Madeline?"

Madeline turned her face alternately on the two men. A faint color had invaded her thin, white cheeks, and her eyes brightened as she said—

"There is no harm in answering the notice; it may mean something."

"Why, of course it does," cried Mr. Jessop, emphatically. "Get a pen, give me the infant, and write a line now, and I'll post it."

And Madeline accordingly sat down and wrote to Mrs. Harper on the spot, while her companions watched her in silence.

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"DEAR MRS. HARPER—I have seen your notice in the *Times* of to-day. My address is—2, Solferino Place, Westminster.

"Yours truly,

"M. W."

She was so accustomed to sign merely her initials, and was so flurried between anticipation, anxiety, excitement, and the screams of the baby, that she never had the presence of mind to write her full name, and on this slight omission, this one little cog, turned a most important factor in her future career.

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CHAPTER VII

A TELEGRAM FOR MISS WEST

THE very morning after Madeline had dispatched her letter, a telegram was handed in for Miss West, 2, Solferino Place. The landlady herself mounted, breathless, to the attics, with the tan-colored envelope in her hand.

"I was just for sending it away, Mrs. Wynne," she gasped, surveying her with an inquiring eye; "but it came into my mind as I'd show it to you on the chance."

"Thank you; it is for me," rejoined her lodger, hastily tearing it open and running her eyes over it. As she read, she became crimson with amazement and agitation. "Come at once —to-day if possible. News of your father.— From Mrs. Harper, Streambridge," was the message.

"But it's for Miss West, and you've gone and opened it!" exclaimed the landlady, suspiciously. "How is that, eh? I never would have supposed—no, never," folding her arms belligerently, "as you wasn't on the square;

and as I've allus kep' a respectable 'ouse, I couldn't think—"

"You need *not* think, Mrs. Kane; you need not alarm yourself about the matter, it is all quite right. I *am* Mrs. Wynne, but I was Miss West once upon a time. The sender of the message does not know that I am married," interrupted Madeline, speaking with studied composure—though her heart was beating fearfully fast.

Insolent as Mrs. Kane was, she dared not quarrel with her. Her roof covered them on sufferance. Were she to thrust them forth, where were they to go? They were entirely at her mercy, for they owed her money; and latterly she had been inclined to take out a large amount of interest in rude insolence, bitting gibes, and unpleasant hints with regard to "paupers a coming and settling down on poor, honest, hard-working people—paupers as could afford dress, and theaters, and pianos once, and saved nothing for a rainy day!"

Paupers—impecunious people like the Wynnes, especially Mrs. Wynne, who bore the brunt of these encounters—could not afford to stand on their dignity, and be independent and "move on." They must submit humbly; but it was insufferably galling—as galling to Madeline as Miss Selina's yoke, that had pressed upon her so sorely but one little year ago.

Who but herself knew with what deprecating eyes and voice she had pleaded with her impatient landlady for a little time, how humbly she

ventured to ask for coals, how stealthily she crept up and down stairs, carrying baby, and doing her own miserable errands, making her presence as unobtrusive as possible, for fear of offending her hostess's threatening eyes.

The hostess's threatening eyes were fixed upon her now, with a look that was an insult, as she listened to her hurried explanation with a down-drawn lip.

"Oh, well, I suppose, as I know no *better*, I must believe you," and with a noisy sniff that intimated quite the reverse, Mrs. Kane glared once round their squalid sitting-room, to see if anything were broken or missing, or the valuable property damaged in any way; and, failing to discover the smallest pretext for complaint, passed out of the apartment with a heavy and aggressive strut, and banged the door behind her.

Madeline lost not a second in rushing to the invalid with the great news, and placing the slip of pink paper in his hand.

"There is something at last! I feel that a change is coming; these terrible days cannot—cannot go on forever. I believe my father is alive, and coming home! What do you think, Laurence?" she asked, and her voice trembled.

Laurence, still holding the telegram in his thin, transparent hand, gazed at his wife for some seconds in silence. How changed she was, he thought, with a pang of self-reproach. She was shabby—very genteelly shabby. Her black dress was all mended and pieced, her face was

haggard, her eyes sunken, their look eager, anxious, almost desperate.

An intelligent spectator would have declared that she was obviously half-starved, and so she was. But how furiously she would have disclaimed such a pronouncement. She would rather have died than have admitted that truth. As long as Laurence had meat once a day, as long as baby had milk, she did very well on anything, and anything may mean almost nothing —it is an elastic word. Meanwhile, Laurence had been telling himself that he had been a culpable wretch to marry Madeline West. What would he say to her father when he placed his daughter in his arms—a daughter in all but rags, with a face pinched with famine, without a friend, without a penny, and weighted with a dying husband and a peculiarly ill-tempered baby?

How much better would it have been if he had curbed his foolish fancy—nipped it in the bud, and left Madeline to her fate. Why had he not wired to Mrs. Wolferton? What would her father say? Would he cast her off?

Madeline had hinted that, as well as she could judge her father from his letters, he was fond of show and style and great people. He wished her to dance and sing and play well, and to speak French; but he had never said a word about literature, or the English classics, or what Laurence called "the higher education of women." On the other hand, he hoped that she would always make acquaintance with girls

her equals, or even superiors, and never lower herself by school-friendships that it would be impossible for him to recognize. Madeline had once innocently repeated this to her husband verbatim, and it came vividly before him now. Madeline had done more than form a friendship of which her aspiring parent would disapprove, a friendship that could be slipped out of like an old glove. Here she was tied for life to a poor man, whose only career seemed likely to be that of an invalid—a stone round her neck as long as he lived.

He had but faint hopes of his own recovery; everything was against it. He knew that this could not be helped, and he was very patient. If he had good wine, wholesome delicacies to tempt his appetite, instead of gruesome scraps of stale, ill-cooked meat and poisonous port at a shilling; if he could have a change to pure, invigorating air, he might yet have a chance. And he knew that he might as well long for the moon—for the entire firmament!

"What is to be done, Laurence?" asked Madeline, rather surprised at his long silence. "What do you think of it?"

"You must go, of course," he returned at last. "Go to-day."

"To-day! My dear Laurence, what are you thinking of?" sitting down on a rush chair as she spoke, and staring at him in amazement. "Where is the money to come from? Look here," producing a shabby little purse, with a brass clasp, and turning out the pitiably small

contents, "all I possess is two and seven-pence."

"Still you must go, Maddie, by hook or crook; much may depend on it. A return third-class—"

"A return third-class would be twenty-two shillings — one pound two," she interrupted. "And, besides, I could not go in this," looking down at her gown; "now," appealingly, "could I?"

"No, you could not," he replied, with a little flush on his pale face. "And you must get something out. To get something out something else must go in. And," speaking with an effort, "I never thought to part with them, but they could not go in a better cause. I mean," wiping his damp forehead, "my mother's miniature and my father's medals. The miniature is framed in seed pearls; the back is gold—it ought to fetch a couple of pounds. It's in my desk, Maddie, in a little morocco case." There were other things in his desk — neatly-copied-out manuscripts. These, alas! were valueless—he had proved them. "Take it, my dear, and welcome; and the medals—they will fetch a few shillings."

"Oh, Laurence," suddenly kneeling down beside him, "I don't like to! Must I really? I know you think so much of them. They are the only relics you possess. No, no; I really can't!"

"Yes, you can, and you shall," said the sick man, with sudden decision. "Here, at last, is an opening for you, my poor Maddie. Something tells me that your father is alive—is coming home rich. You are his only child, his heir-

ess. You will be looked after and cherished when I am gone. Yes, my dear, it will be best for you in the end. It was most wicked of me to marry you. I see it all now, only too plainly. I had put by nothing for such a strait, and I had no wealthy friends. But I never dreamed that it would come to this, Maddie; believe me, I never did. Forgive me!" he urged, and tears, born of weakness and remorse, stood in his hollow eyes.

"Laurence!" she interrupted, attempting to place her hand on his mouth.

"I should have walked home in the snow that night; I should have taken you to the Wolfertons' house, and telegraphed for her; I should have gone to the parish clergyman—done anything but what I did, and which led to my dragging you into such a pit as this!" with an inclusive wave of his hand and a glance round the mean little attic. "But it won't be for long now," he added in a lower voice.

"Oh, Laurence," she almost screamed as she seized his arm, "why are you telling me such terrible things, when we have a little gleam of hope at last? It is cruel—cruel of you. You couldn't mean that, after all we have gone through together—that when we are approaching smooth water — you — you would leave me!"

And here she suddenly broke down and burst into tears, for, alas! she had an agonizing inward conviction that there was truth in what he said. How pale and thin and wasted he looked! No

one would recognize him who had seen him last year, with his shorn head, gaunt cheekbones, and sunken eyes; and she had a heart-breaking feeling that it was not mere actual illness, nor the dregs of that terrible fever, that were to blame for this, but that cruel, pitiless, ferocious wolf called WANT. He was dying of the lack of mere necessaries, and she, miserable woman, was powerless to procure them; and for this she laid down her head and wept as if her heart would burst—her passionate sobbing fairly frightened Laurence. Madeline's tears were rarely seen; Madeline was always bright, cheery, almost gay, at the very worst of times; and now came a reaction, and she was weeping as he had never seen any one weep before.

"Don't, Maddie, don't," he whispered, feebly stroking her hair; "you will be better without me, though you don't think so now. You are young--only nineteen—many bright days may be in store for you. I will leave you contentedly, if your father has come home. The greatest horror I have ever known will be lifted from my mind. You don't know, dearest, what torments have racked me as I lay awake through the long, dark nights, listening to the clocks striking hour after hour, and wondering what would become of you? Now Providence has answered the question; your father will give you and the child a home. There, Maddie, there, don't; I can't bear to see you cry like this; and I—I may get over it, and— And now, you see, you have awakened the baby!" as a shrill, querulous cry

from the next room interrupted what he was about to say.

The maternal instinct thus roused, he hoped that her tears would cease, as he was powerless to arrest them. And Madeline completely broken down—Madeline, who was always so brave, who had come out in a new light under the scorching flames of the furnace of affliction—was a sight that completely unmanned him.

Madeline hastily dried her eyes, strangled her sobs, took her shrieking offspring out of his cradle, and gave him his midday bottle—an operation which appeased his appetite and soothed his feelings. Then she came back to her husband with the child in her arms, and said in a husky voice, "If you had change of air, good food, properly cooked, fruit, wine, and the little delicacies all sick people require, you would get well—I know you would. Promise me, promise that you will try to get better! Promise me that you will wish to get better, Laurence," she continued tremulously, "for—for our sake."

"I can promise that, at any rate, Maddie," he answered with a dim smile; "but you know the old proverb about wishes."

"And you know that while there's life there's hope," she answered quickly. "I have hope; you must have hope, too! And now I am going out, you will have to mind baby," placing the white bundle beside his father, who eyed his charge dubiously, as it stared at him stolidly, thumb in mouth.

Madeline hurriedly put on her hat and jacket,

and, taking a key, unlocked a brass-bound desk, and, after a little search, drew out the morocco case. "Is this it?" she asked, holding it up. "This is what you meán?"

A nod assured her that it was.

"You would like to look at it once more," she said, gently laying it in his hand. "I don't know how to take it. You are so like her, too," looking down at the little oval miniature of a pretty, spirited girl with dark eyes and dark hair, and seeing her husband's gaze fixed greedily on the portrait. "You were so fond of her, Laurence."

"Not more than I am of you, Maddie," he answered, closing the case with a decisive snap. "And my father's medals," he said, as he held them up, and looked at them wistfully. "Well, they will fetch a few shillings, and they go in a good cause. Here, take them, my dear, and go, and don't be long."

Needless to add this formula. Was she ever long? But time passed very slowly when Madeline was absent from those two poor attics which were called home.

CHAPTER VIII

NOT MARRIED AFTER ALL

"He has not awoke since, has he?" asked the anxious mother, as, fully an hour later, she reappeared with a bundle and a basket. "No"—with a sigh of relief—"I see he is sound," laying down her load as she spoke. "And now to begin at the very beginning, and to tell you everything, Laurence," opening the basket and producing a bottle. "Here is some good port wine; I've carried it most carefully, so as not to shake it. You must have a glass at once—that is to be the beginning."

"Oh, Maddie, what extravagance! When you—"

"Hush! please to listen," exhibiting as she spoke a bunch of grapes, six fresh eggs, a jar of Bovril, and a packet of biscuits from her seemingly inexhaustible store, and laying them on the table.

"Then you are *not* going!" exclaimed her husband, in a tone of deep disapproval.

"Oh, yes, I am," she answered promptly, now

opening the bundle, and shaking out a dress that she had pawned, and regarding it with an expression that showed it was an old and favorite friend. "Here is an A B C guide. I go to-night when I have left you comfortable, and baby asleep. Mrs. Kane's niece has promised to look after you to-morrow, and to-morrow night I return, all being well."

"Then they gave you a good price for the miniature and the medals?"

"Price!" she echoed indignantly. "They turned the miniature over and over, and sneered at it, and said they had no sale for such like; but they could not say that it wasn't real gold and pearls, and they gave me eighteen shillings, and said it was more than it was worth, and ten shillings on the medals. Medals are a drug in the market."

"Then how—where did you get money for your journey?" asked her husband in a tone of amazement bordering on impatience

"See here!" holding up both her bare hands. Very pretty hands they were, but now a little coarse from hard work. "Do you miss anything, Laurence?" coloring guiltily.

"Yes, your — wedding ring — and keeper," after a moment's pause—a pause of incredulity.

"You won't be angry with me, dear, will you?" she said coaxingly, coming and kneeling beside him. "It makes no real difference, does it? Please—please don't be vexed; but I got a sovereign on them, and they are the first things I shall redeem. You must have nourishing

food, even if I had to steal it; and I would steal for you!" she added, passionately. "I shall only take a single ticket—third class. Mrs. Harper will surely lend me a few pounds, and I will be able to leave ten shillings for you to go on with."

"How can I be angry with you, Maddie?" he replied. "It is all my fault—the fault of my rashness, thoughtlessness, selfishness—that you have had to do this, my poor child! Oh, that snowy night was a bad one for you! I ought to have left you, and walked back."

"Such nonsense!" cried his wife, whose spirits were rising. "I won't hear you say such things! It's a long lane that has no turning. I think—oh, I believe and pray—that I do see the end of ours! And now there is a nice roast chicken for your dinner. I left it with Mrs. Kane downstairs. She asked me if I had come in for a fortune? A fortune, indeed! It was only three and threepence, but I told her that I believed that I *had*. Oh, dear, oh, dear, I hope my words will come true!"

. . . . . .

Madeline's packing was represented by changing her dress; her preparations were confined to brushing, rubbing, and inking her hat, mending her gloves, which, like the typical landlady, "had seen better days," and to washing and getting up a pair of cuffs with her own hands.

"You look quite smart, Maddie," said Laurence, as she completed her toilet, and came and showed herself to him.

"Yes; I don't look so very, *very* poor, do I?"

"No-o," rather dubiously. Then he added, with a smile, "No one who looks at your face will think of your clothes; and, indeed, Maddie, it is not fit that such a pretty girl as you are should be traveling alone, and third class, such a long journey."

"Rubbish! rubbish! rubbish!" she answered emphatically. "I'll wear a veil, if *that* will please you; and, indeed, no one will notice me. If they do, they will think I am some poor girl going to a situation. You think every one must admire what you thought pretty, you stupid Laurence; but I heard Mrs. Kane saying the other day that I'd grown 'awfully plain.' And it's not my face Mrs. Harper will notice—you may be certain of that!"

Ten minutes later she had kissed the sleeping baby, taken leave of Laurence, given many whispered directions to Mrs. Kane's niece, and a whole half-sovereign from her little fund; and then, with a beating heart, started on foot for a distant terminus. No, she would not take even a twopenny fare in a 'bus; she must save every penny, and she would have plenty of rest in the train. And so she had, of a sort, on the hard, upright seat of a crowded third-class carriage for eight mortal hours. There is not much repose in such a situation, nor much sleep to be obtained; and the train roared along through the inky black night, and tore through small stations with a shriek of contempt that shook them to

their foundations, and nearly shook the teeth of the unhappy third-class passengers out of their heads. After a whole night's traveling of this uneasy description, Madeline arrived at her destination—Riverside—and quickly alighted on the platform. One trouble was spared her—luggage.

She went and washed her face and hands, arranged her hair, shook off some of the dust in the waiting-room, invested fourpence in a bun and cup of coffee, and felt herself sufficiently fortified to encounter Mrs. Harper—but not Miss Selina. Another journey by rail, a short walk, and she found herself once more on the familiar doorstep of Harperton House, and rang timidly.

A strange maid (who knew not the delinquencies of Miss West) opened the door, and was evidently surprised to behold such an early visitor.

She informed her that Mrs. Harper was not down yet, nor Miss Harper, and showed her into the drawing-room, which was in process of being dusted. Here she waited for some time, while a sound of hasty footsteps and voices was very audible above her head. She looked around the room, and felt as if she had only quitted it yesterday. And oh! what a gap there was in her life between the last time she stood there, listening to Miss Selina's spiteful remonstrances, and now! But the room was precisely the same. There was the best piano, on which she had had many a music-lesson. There was Alice Burns' big colored-chalk drawing, Amy Watson's two

water-colors; Florence Blewitt's brass work, and Isabella Jones's photograph screen — all votive offerings to the Harper family, and advertisements to pupils' relatives who came to make inquiries about the school.

Presently the door opened, and Miss Harper—if we may dare to say so—burst into the room.

"Oh, Madeline!" she exclaimed, "so it's you. She only said a young lady. How more than thankful I am to see you!" shaking hands as she spoke, and looking into her face with eager scrutiny. "You are thin—very thin; but thin or fat, you are welcome back. Come up at once to my mother's room; she is dressing. She does not come down early now, and she wants to see you" (here was an honor). "Come, the girls are all in the schoolroom. The breakfast-bell will be rung in ten minutes," turning to lead the way. Then she paused for a moment, with the handle in her hand. "You have heard about Selina?" she asked, with a red spot on either cheek, and a spark in either eye. "What! Have you *not* heard?" she added hurriedly.

Miss Selina! It was not of Miss Selina Madeline had come to hear; and she shook her head and answered, "No; is she dead?"

"Dead! She's married. She married nearly a year ago," returned her sister, impressively, "Mr. Murphy, the red-haired curate. She—she behaved atrociously. Don't mention her to my mother, nor ask about her, on any account. We don't speak," flinging the door wide as she gasped out the last sentence.

All the reply Madeline made was "Indeed!" But nevertheless she felt a very lively satisfaction to hear that her old enemy was no longer an inmate of Harperton, and had gone away, like herself, in disgrace.

"You will find my mother rather changed," whispered Miss Harper, as she rapidly preceded her upstairs. "She's had a slight stroke. All the troubles and annoyance about Selina were enough to kill her, and she is not what she was. She never comes down till the afternoon; but take no notice."

"Madeline!" cried the old lady, as Madeline entered her room and beheld her propped up in bed, in her best day cap. "This is too good to be true! I scarcely expected it, though I have advertised every day in the 'Times.' Come here, my dear, and kiss me"—tendering a withered cheek. The old lady's mind was certainly affected, thought her late pupil. That she who had been so ignominiously cast out should be thus welcomed back, and with kisses, was scarcely credible, unless viewed from the idea that Mrs. Harper had become imbecile in the meanwhile. But no, the reason of this astonishing change from the frost of neglect to the sun of welcome—affectionate welcome—was a very potent one indeed. It was nothing less than the prospect of a large sum of money.

Since Madeline had been banished, nothing had gone well. Her place had been taken by a governess who had actually required a salary, as well as civility, and had been a great encum-

brance and expense. Then came Selina's wicked tampering with her sister's sweetheart, a heart-burning scandal, family linen sent to the public wash, and a serious falling off in the school. Things were going badly. Every step was down hill—one girl leaving after another, and there were many vacant places at the long dinner-table.

At last came a letter—from Mr. West of all people! inclosing a large draft on his bankers, and announcing his return a wealthy and successful man. The draft was to pay for two years' schooling, with interest up to date; but for a whole year Miss West had been elsewhere! How could they honestly claim these badly-wanted pounds? They had banished the man's daughter, and the money must be restored.

Viewed now—in a softer light, through a golden atmosphere—Madeline's deeds were excusable. The poor girl had been Selina's victim, and therefore more to be pitied than blamed. Madeline must be sought and, if possible, discovered and reinstated as if there had been no hiatus, as if nothing disagreeable had occurred. And we have seen the "state of life" in which Madeline had been found.

"Letitia, do you go down now, and presently send up a nice breakfast for two—two fresh eggs—while I have a talk with dear Madeline." Thus the old lady, who still held the reins of authority, although she had lost the use of her right hand; and Letitia, having previously rehearsed the whole "talk" with her mother, and

fearing that "too many cooks might spoil the broth," departed with meek obedience.

"Take off your hat and jacket, my love, and make yourself at home. I am sure you will not be surprised to hear—yes, put them on the ottoman—that your father is alive and well, and returning an *im*mensely"—dwelling lovingly on the word—"rich man."

Madeline's heart bounded into her mouth, her face became like flame. So her presentiment had come true!

"Ah! I see you are surprised, darling: so were we when we got his letter, a week ago. Here, bring me that case, the green one on the little table, and I'll read it to you at once—or you may read it yourself if you like, Madeline."

Madeline did as requested, picked out a foreign letter in a well-known hand, and sat down to peruse it beside Mrs. Harper's bed. That lady, having assumed her spectacles for the nonce, scanned her late pupil's face with keen intentness.

This is what the letter said:

"ROYAL KANGAROO CLUB,
"COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE.

'MY DEAR MRS. HARPER—After such a long silence, you will be surprised to see my writing, but here I am. I am afraid Madeline has been rather uneasy about me—and, indeed, no wonder. I met with some terrible losses in bank shares two years ago: nearly the whole of my life's

earnings were engulfed in an unparalleled financial catastrophe. The anxiety and trouble all but killed me—threw me into a fever, from the effects of which I was laid up for months—many months. and when I again put my shoulder to the wheel I was determined not to write home until I was as rich a man as ever. I knew that you, who had had the care of Madeline since she was seven, would trust me, and everything would go on as usual. I had always been such punctual pay you would give me time for once. I am now, I am glad to say, a wealthy man. Some lots of land I bought years ago have turned up trumps—in short, gold. I am not going to speculate again, but am returning home a millionaire, and Maddie shall keep house in London, and hold up her head among the best. Stray bits of news have drifted to my ears. I heard a foolish story about some beggarly barrister or curate and her. A schoolgirl wrote it to her brother; but I am certain it was only girls' tittle-tattle. Surely you would never allow my *heiress* to play the fool! If she did, she knows very well that I would disown her. I am a fond father in my way, and a good father, as *you* can testify, but I'll have no pauper fortune-hunters or puling love affairs. A hint from you to Madeline, that at the least nonsense of *that* sort I marry again, and let her please herself, will be, at any rate, a stitch in time. She has had a good education. She can earn her bread; but I know it is not necessary to continue this subject. You are a sensible woman; Madeline is a sen-

sible girl, if she is my daughter. And I have great views for her, very great views. I shall follow this letter in about six weeks' time, and will write again before I leave. I shall come by the 'Ophir,' Orient Line, and you and Maddie can meet me in Plymouth. I inclose a draft on my agents for six hundred pounds, five hundred for Maddie's schooling and outfit for two years, and the balance for pocket-money and a few new frocks, so that she may be smart when her old daddie comes home."

Madeline paused, and shook the letter. No, no draft fluttered out.

"I have banked it," put in Mrs. Harper, precipitately, who had been scrutinizing every change in the girl's face. "It is quite safe."

"And now I must wind up, hoping soon to see Madeline, and with love to her and compliments to yourself and daughters, especially the lively Miss Selina.

"Yours faithfully,

"ROBERT WEST."

"Well, Madeline, tell me what you think of that?" demanded Mrs. Harper, wiping her glasses.

"I—I—am very glad of course," she returned, her brain and ideas in a whirl; but now fully comprehending the cause of Mrs. Harper's blandishments and welcome.

"We are so sorry, love, that we were so hasty

about Mr. Wynne. It was entirely Selina's doing, I do assure you. I am most thankful to see —especially after your father's letter—that you did *not* marry him after all!"

"Not marry him," echoed the girl, coloring vividly. "What do you mean?"

"I see you are not married by your hand," pointing a long finger at Madeline's ringless member. "Is not that sufficient proof?" she asked sharply.

Madeline was suddenly aware that she was at a crisis—a great moral crisis—in her life, when she must take action at once, an action that meant much. Her father's letter, Mrs. Harper's conclusion, her own dire want, all prompted the quick decision made on the instant. She would for the present temporize—at least till she had met her father, told him her story in her own way, and accomplished a full pardon. To declare *now* that she was a wife would be ruin—ruin to her, death to Laurence, for of course her father would cut her off with a shilling. She was aware that he had very strong prejudices, a grotesque adoration for rank and success, and a corresponding abhorrence of those who were poor, needy, and obscure; also that he was a man of his word. This she had gleaned out in Australia when but seven years of age. They had lived in a splendid mansion in Toorak, the most fashionable suburb of Melbourne, and an elderly reduced Englishwoman had been her governess. But because she had permitted her to play with some children whose father was in

difficulties, who was socially ostracized, she had been discharged at a week's notice, and Madeline had been dispatched to England. Her father was peculiar — yes. In a second her mind was resolved, and, with hands that shook as she folded up the crackling foreign notepaper, she reassumed the character of Miss West!

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CHAPTER IX

BARGAINING

"You see, my love," proceeded Mrs. Harper, in a smooth, insinuating tone, "it is not *every one* who would take you back under the circumstances;" and she paused, and peered at the girl over her spectacles with a significant air. (The circumstances of five hundred pounds, thought her listener bitterly.) "Will you give me your word of honor that you have not been doing any thing — unbecoming — anything that — that— would reflect on your reputation? My dear, you need not look so red and indignant. I'm only an old woman. I mean no offense."

"I have done nothing to be ashamed of, or which I shall ever blush for or regret," rejoined Madeline, impressively; "and to that I can give my word of honor. But, Mrs. Harper, you ask strange questions— and I am no longer at school."

"Well, well, my dear—well, well; we *did* hear that you were in the mantle department at Marshall & Snelgrove's. I believe there are ladies

in these establishments;" and then she added craftily, "You have such a nice, tall, slight figure—for trying on things. You were always so graceful, and had such taking manners!"

"I was not there, Mrs. Harper," returned Madeline; "and I cannot tell you where I was, beyond that I lived with a friend, and that I was very poor."

"A friend, at Solferino Place?" quickly.

"Yes"—with visible reluctance—"at Solferino Place. And now what do you want with me, Mrs. Harper?" she asked, with unexpected boldness.

"Well, I wish"—clearing her throat—"and so does Letitia, to let bygones be bygones; to allow your father to find you here, as if you had *never* been away; to hush up your escapade—for though, of course, I believe you—it might sound a little curious to him. No one knows why you left, excepting Selina—Mrs. Murphy. It happened in the holidays. These girls are a new set, and have never heard of you; and, even if they had, they would not meet Mr. West, as he arrives during Easter term. Do you agree to this?"

"Yes," replied Madeline, with sudden pallor, but a steady voice, "I agree; it will be best."

"That is arranged, then," said the old diplomatist, briskly. "And, now, what about the money?—what about that? Shall we keep the five hundred pounds, and give you the balance?"

In former days Madeline would have assented to this proposition at once; but now her heart

beat tumultuously as she thought of Laurence and the baby. She must secure all she could for their sakes, and, feeling desperately nervous, she replied—

"No, I can't quite see that, Mrs. Harper. To one year's payment and interest you are, of course, entitled; but the second year I worked for my living—worked very hard indeed. You can scarcely expect to take two hundred pounds, as well as my services—gratis."

But Mrs. Harper *had* expected it confidently, and this unlooked-for opposition was a blow. Madeline was not as nice as she used to be, and she must really put some searching questions to her respecting her absence, if she was going to be so horribly grasping about money; and Madeline, blushing for very shame as she bargained with this old female Shylock, reluctantly yielded one hundred pounds for the year she had been pupil-teacher. It was money versus character—and a character is expensive.

Mrs. Harper, on her part, undertook to arrange Madeline's past very completely, and Madeline felt that it must be veiled from her father for the present—at any rate, until Laurence was better, and able to resume work and a foothold on existence.

She had assured him yesterday that she would steal for him if necessary. Was not this as bad, she asked herself, bargaining and chaffering thus over her father's money, and dividing it with the greedy old creature at her side? However, she was to have one hundred and eighty pounds for

her share. Oh, riches! Oh, what could she not do with that sum?

She was to return to her friends at Solferino Place for three weeks—(she had struggled and battled fiercely for this concession, and carried the day)—was then to return to Harperton, and be subsequently escorted to Plymouth by Miss Harper, who would personally restore her to her father's arms.

After the morning's exciting business, Madeline was wearied, flushed, and had a splitting headache. She was not sorry to share Mrs. Harper's excellent tea, and to be allowed to take off her dress and go and lie down in a spare room upstairs—a room once full, but now empty—and there she had a long think; and, being completely worn out, a long, long sleep.

After dinner—early dinner—she went out with Miss Harper, and the money—her share—was paid to her without delay. She had stipulated for this. Could it be possible that it was she, Madeline Wynne, who stood opposite to the cashier's desk cramming notes and sovereigns into her sixpenny purse? As they pursued their walk, Madeline recognized a few old faces and many old places. She purchased a new hat, which she put on in the shop; and she heard, to her relief, that the Wolfertons had left, and gone to live abroad. Some former schoolfellows, now grown up—no young plant grows quicker than a schoolgirl—recognized and accosted her. These had been day-boarders. They mentally remarked that she had turned out very different

to what they expected, and that she looked much older than her age. "She was staying at Mrs. Harper's, was she?"

Before they had time to ask the hundred and one questions with which they were charged, Miss Harper prudently hurried her pupil away, saying, as she did so:

"Least said, soonest mended, my dear. It's well you had on your new hat! Now you had better get some gloves."

She was not quite as keen about the money as her mother, and was inclined—nay, anxious—to be amiable. Madeline West, the great Australian heiress, had possibilities in her power. She was resolved to be friendly with her, and to reinstate her at once as the favorite pupil of former days, burying in oblivion the teacher interlude.

The girls Madeline had met walked on disappointed, saying to one another:

"Fancy *that* being Maddie West! How awful she looks! So seedy, and so thin and careworn; and she is barely my age—in fact, she is a week younger!"

"And so frightfully shabby," put in another.

"Did you see her dress—all creases?"

"And her gloves!" (The gloves were apparently beyond description.)

"All the same, Miss Harper was making a great fuss—a great deal of her. It was 'dear' this, and 'love' that. She is never affectionate for nothing. I know the old boa-constrictor so well. Perhaps Maddie has been left a fortune?" hazarded the sharpest of the party.

"Her dress and jacket looked extremely like it," sneered number one. "As to her hat, I saw it in at Mason's this morning—I noticed it particularly, marked eleven and ninepence. *That* looks like being an heiress! Oh, very much so, indeed!"

The price of the hat settled the question!

CHAPTER X

MRS. KANE BECOMES AFFECTIONATE

Mrs. Harper would not hear of Madeline returning to London by night. No, it was a most shocking idea, and not to be entertained. She must remain until the next day at least, "and travel properly," which meant that Miss Harper herself conducted the heiress to Riverside, and saw her off by the morning express, first-class. It was in vain that Madeline protested that such precautions were quite unnecessary. She was anxious to save her fare and return third; for, even with such wealth as one hundred and eighty pounds every shilling would be required. But her voice was silenced. Miss Harper carried the day, took her late pupil to the station, gave her into the charge of the guard, and even went so far as to present her with a two-shilling novel, to while away the journey (an attention that she hoped would bear fruit by-and-by). But Madeline did not need it; her own thoughts were sufficient to absorb her whole attention as she

traveled rapidly homeward. She was sensible of some disquieting pangs when she thought of Laurence. Would he be angry when he heard that his wife had once more assumed her maiden name, and pretended that she was still Madeline West?

No, no; he must forgive her, when there was so much at stake. Her hand closed involuntarily on her purse, that precious purse which contained the first payment for the fraud she had been compelled to practice. About five o'clock that evening Madeline's quick foot was once more heard ascending the stairs, and with hasty fingers she opened the sitting-room door and rushed into her husband's presence. He was up and dressed—(at all but the worst of times he would insist on dragging himself out of bed and dressing)—seated at her table, laboriously doing some copying, with slow and shaky fingers.

It should here be stated, in justice to Mrs. Harper, that she had passed Madeline under the harrow of searching inquiries, and elicited the intelligence that she made her livelihood by law copying, and she was satisfied that it was a respectable employment.

"Ah!" exclaimed the astute dame, "I suppose Mr. Wynne put that bit of work in your way, did he?" Fortunately for her new role, Madeline could truthfully reply, "No," for it was not Laurence who had been the means of procuring this employment, such as it was, but Mr. Jessop.

"You will give me your permanent address,

Madeline," said Mrs. Harper, austerely. "That must be thoroughly understood."

"But you have it already, Mrs. Harper."

"Have you lodged there long?" she asked, feeling confident that no well-known counsel at the bar could outdo her in crafty questions.

"Fourteen months," said her pupil, rather shortly.

"Then you must have been pretty comfortable?"

To which Madeline evasively replied that she had been quite happy. (No thanks to Mrs. Kane.)

And Mrs. Harper was satisfied. She had found out all she wished to know. Madeline's past was as clear as daylight now! *Was it?*

And now behold Madeline at home once more, flushed with excitement, exhilarated by the change, by the money in her purse, and with her bright eyes, bright color, and new hat, making quite a cheerful and brilliant appearance before the amazed and languid invalid.

He was looking very ill to-day. These close, stifling rooms and sleepless nights were gradually sapping his scanty stock of vitality.

"Baby is asleep," she said, glancing eagerly into the cradle. "And now I am going to tell you all about it," taking off her hat and gloves, and pushing aside her husband's writing materials, filling him up a glass of port, fetching a biscuit, and taking a seat opposite to him, all within the space of three minutes.

"You have good news, Maddie, I see," he remarked as he looked at her, and noticed her condition of suppressed excitement, and her sparkling eyes.

"Good?—news, yes; and money!" pulling out her purse and displaying thick rolls of Bank of England notes, and some shining sovereigns. "Oh, Laurence dear, I feel so happy, all but in one little corner of my conscience, and I'm afraid you'll be angry with me—about something—that is the one drawback! I don't know how to begin to tell you—best begin with the worst. I've gone back to being Madeline West once more; they don't know that I am married."

"Madeline!" he ejaculated sternly. "You are not in earnest?"

"Now, dear, don't; don't speak till you hear all. You know how I left, how I traveled with the price of my rings. I arrived, was shown up into Mrs. Harper's own room—where, in old times, girls were sent for to have bad news broken to them. She has had a stroke. Miss Selina is married, and Mr. Murphy is gone. The school is going down. So when Mrs. Harper had a letter from my father, inclosing five hundred pounds for two years' expenses, and one hundred for me for pocket-money, it was a most welcome surprise, and they were anxious to find me, of course"—pausing for a second to take breath. "Don't interrupt me, *yet*," she pleaded, with outstretched hands. "Mrs. Harper gave me papa's letter to read. He had lost money, he had been ill for a long time, he had no wish to

write until he was again a rich man. Now he is a millionaire, and is coming home immediately, expecting to find me still at the Harpers', and still Miss West. I am to be a great heiress. I am to keep his house; and, Laurence, dear, he had heard a hint of *you*. I know it was that detestable gossip, Maggie Wilkinson. She had a cousin in an office in Melbourne, and used to write him volumes. And, oh, he says dreadful things—I mean my father—if I marry a poor man, as he has such—such—views. That was the word; and if I disappoint him, I am to be turned from his door penniless, to earn my own bread!"

"As you are doing now," observed her listener, bitterly.

"Yes!" with a gesture of despair; "but what is it—for you and me and baby—what are nine shillings a week? Then Mrs. Harper exclaimed, with great relief, 'I see you are not married!' pointing to my hand; and it all came into my mind like a flash. I did not say I was not married, I uttered no actual untruth; but I allowed her to think so. The temptation was too great; there was the wealth for the taking—money that would bring you health. I said I would steal for you, Laurence; but it was not stealing, it was, in a sense, my own money, intended for my use. Are you very angry with me for what I have done, dear?" she wound up rather timidly.

"No, Madeline. I see you could not help yourself, poor child, with starvation staring you in the face, and a sick husband and infant to sup-

port! Your father has views for you, has he? I wonder how this view"—indicating himself and the cradle—"would strike him. As far as I am concerned, it won't be for long, and your father will forgive you; but the child, Maddie—on his account your marriage—"

"Laurence!" she almost screamed, "don't! Do you think the child would make up for you? Am I not doing all this for *you*—acting a part, clothing myself in deceit, for you—only for *you?* Do not tell me that it is all to go for nothing! If I thought that, I would give it up at once. My sole object is to gain time, and money, until you are yourself once more, and able to earn our living at your profession. Then, having done all to smooth the way, I shall confess my marriage to my father. If he renounces me, I shall still have you, and you will have me. But, without this money to go on with, to get the best advice, plenty of nourishment, and change of air, I don't know what I should do?" And she surveyed him with a pair of truly tragic eyes. "It has come to me like a reprieve to a condemned criminal. Say, Laurence, that I have done right. Oh, please say it!" putting out her hands, with a pretty begging gesture.

"No, dearest Maddie, I cannot say that; but I will say that, under the circumstances, it was a great, an almost irresistible temptation."

"Then, at least, say you are not angry with me."

"I can say no to that from the bottom of my heart. How can I be angry, when I myself am

the cause—when it has all been done for *me?* The only thing is, that there may be difficulties later on," looking into the future with his practical lawyer's eye. "There may be difficulties and a desperate entanglement in store for you, my pretty, reckless Maddie. You know the lines—

> "'Oh, what a tangled web we weave,
> When once we practice to deceive.'"

"At any rate, I shall make the best of *my* web," said his wife, springing up. "I am going to take Mr. Jessop into my confidence."

"Are you? Well, I suppose it will be best."

"Yes, of course it will; I am going to write to him now. The very first doctor in London is to come and see you; and, as soon as you can be moved, you go into the country—that I insist upon."

"I go into the country, do I?" with a grim smile. He was saying to himself, as he looked at her eager anxious face, that the only country he would ever go into now would be down to the old burying-place of the Wynne family. At least his relations could not refuse him admission there, or close that door—the door of the family vault—in his face.

And when he was at rest, under the walls of the old gray church, Madeline, as a widow, would be as much her father's heiress and housekeeper as if she had never been a wife. In fact, her days of misfortune would enhance her domestic worth, at least she had learned the value

of money! As for himself, he was reduced to such a low ebb, mentally and physically, that death would be a release. To return to life—with a capital L—and to take up his heavy load, and plod on and on like an omnibus horse, was not an alluring prospect. Madeline's future was safe, and he would rather be under the green sod, with all the dead and gone Wynnes—when, after life's fitful fever, they slept well.

It will be seen from this that Mr. Wynne was in a bad way—too weak, too hopeless, even to care to struggle back to health. But Madeline had now sufficient energy for two. Hope pervaded her young veins, decision and prompt action were its outcome, and money was power.

In the first place, she scribbled a hasty note to Mr. Jessop, and begged him to call on them that evening without fail. This she dispatched by a little boy, paying a precious sixpence to save time. Then she descended like a whirlwind upon Mrs. Kane, and begged to see her for a moment alone. She had made a bold resolve—there was no alternative. She was about to take Mrs. Kane—the insolent, the red-faced, the incredulous—into her confidence. She had Hobson's choice, and, in fact, was at her wits' end. Supposing inquiries were made, supposing Mrs. Harper wrote and asked awkward questions, and who so ready to answer them—unless previously prepared, previously bribed, previously flattered, by being let into the secret—as Mrs. Kane?

"Mrs. Kane," said Madeline, knocking at that

lady's door, the door of her own sanctum, "I have something to say to you in private."

"Bless me, Mrs. Wynne, how white your face is!" exclaimed the other tartly, having been just about to sit down to her supper—tripe and bottled stout. "Whatever is the matter *now?* Not the bailiffs—that I do hope."

"No, no, no; quite the contrary." Then, struck by a happy thought, "How much do we owe you, Mrs. Kane?"

"Ah, owe me!" rather staggered. "Let's see, thirteen weeks, at ten shillings, is six pounds ten; then the coal— Here," making a raid on a rickety writing-table, "I have it all down," searching among some papers. "Yes, here it is. Coal, one pound one, kindling wood, matches, postage on a parcel — total, eight pounds, thirteen and sevenpence - halfpenny. Are you going to settle it?" she asked briskly.

"Yes, I am," replied Madeline, now drawing out her full, her overflowing purse. What courage, what confidence were conferred by the very feel of its contents! Mrs. Kane gazed at it with eyes as distended as those of a bull frog, and with her mouth half open. "A ten-pound note, Mrs. Kane." And Mrs. Wynne tendered one as she spoke.

"So I see," in a milder key. "I'll get you change, and, though I says it as shouldn't, it's not everybody, you know yourself, who would have—"

"Yes, quite true, I know all that already, thank you, Mrs. Kane. Never mind the change

just now, it can go toward the milk bill. What I wanted to speak to you about is to tell you a family secret—which concerns me."

"A family secret! Laws, Mrs. Wynne!" suddenly seating herself with a plunge, and looking at her lodger with a countenance of gratified anticipation, "whatever can it be?"

"Promise, on your solemn word of honor, not to tell any one."

"Oh, I'm as safe as a church; no one will get anything out of me"—mentally resolving to tell her niece and husband without any churlish delay—"unless it's something not on the square."

"It is quite on the square; you need not fear. Once I was a Miss West."

"So you told me," nodding her head.

"I was at school near Riverside for a good many years. My father is an Australian merchant—very rich."

"Oh, indeed!" in a comfortable tone.

"But for two years he had not been heard of, we thought that he was dead, and I became a teacher at school. Mr. Wynne saw me there, and paid me attention, which displeased Mrs. Harper very much. I was sent away, and we were married. We have been here ever since."

"So you have," agreed Mrs. Kane, as much as to say, "And it's highly to your credit!"

"Well, now my father has written at last; he is coming home, immensely rich. He has not heard of my marriage."

"Laws, you don't say so!" in a tone of admiration and astonishment.

"No one has heard of it, you see. I had no friends. And if my father knew that I had married a poor man, he would be dreadfully angry—at least at first. I went down to Mrs. Harper's; she showed me his letter. She thinks I am not married, for," holding up her bare left hand, "I pawned my rings to pay my railway fare."

"Oh, my goodness! Did you really, now?"

"And she took it for granted that I was still Miss West. I confessed nothing. I told her I had lived here for fourteen months, that I worked at law stationery, and was very poor, and she was apparently satisfied; but, all the same, I firmly believe she will write and ask you all about me. Neither she nor my father must know of my marriage—*yet*. And now, are you quite prepared? I am Miss West, you know, who has lived with you since last January year. You understand, Mrs. Kane?"

"Oh, yes!" with an expressive wink. "A nice, quiet, respectable young lady—never going nowhere, keeping no company, and I only wishes I had a dozen like her. I'll give it her all pat, you be quite certain," said her landlady, rubbing her bare fat arms with the liveliest delight at her own *rôle* in the piece. "But how about Mr. Wynne and the baby?" she asked slyly.

"You need not mention them. It will be all right later on, when I see my father and prepare him, you know. But now I am obliged to keep him in the dark. Mrs. Harper would not have

given me my money had she known. It's only for a short time that I am forced to resume my old name, and I assure you, Mrs. Kane, that it's not very pleasant."

"Ay, well now, I think it's rather a joke—something like a play at the Adelphi, where in the end the father comes in and blesses the young couple, and they all live together, happy as sandboys, ever after. That will be your case, you'll see!" emphatically.

"I hope so, but I doubt it," returned her lodger. "I will be content if my husband recovers his health. Money is nothing in comparison to health."

"Ay, maybe so; but money is a great comfort all the same," said Mrs. Kane, squeezing the note affectionately in her hand, and wondering how many more of the same quality were in Mrs. Wynne's purse—"a great comfort!"

"Well then, now you know all, Mrs. Kane," said the other, rising, "I can depend on you? You will be our friend in this matter, and, believe me, you will be no loser."

"Certainly you can't say fairer nor that, can you, ma'am?—though, as far as I'm concerned, I'm always delighted to oblige a lady for nothing, and I always fancied you from the first time I saw you in the hall, and you knocked over that pot of musk, and so Maria will tell you. As for the secret, wild horses would not tear it from me; and I'm that interested in you, as I couldn't express to you, and allus was—you ask Maria—

just as if you was my own daughter. I can't say fairer nor that, can I?"

And opening the door with a wide flourish, she waved Madeline through, who, rather staggered by this unexpected compliment, passed quickly into the lobby, and with a farewell nod, hurried back to her family in the upper regions, and set about preparing tea. She also made preparations for the expected visit of their chief counselor, Mr. Henry Jessop.

CHAPTER XI

CHANGE OF AIR AND SCENE

Mr. Jessop duly arrived, and found, to his amazement, that his fish and fruit had been forestalled; and there were other and yet greater surprises in store for him.

He listened to Madeline's plainly told tale, with his glass rigidly screwed into his eye, his mouth pinched up as if he had an unusually intricate "case" under his consideration.

He never once interrupted her, until she brought her recital to an end, and she, in the heat and haste of her narrative, had permitted him to know more of their poverty than he had dreamed of.

The Wynnes were as proud as they were poor; the extremity of their straits was kept for their own exclusive experience. Mr. Jessop gave an involuntary little gasp as he listened to the revelation about the pawnbroker, the history of the miniature, and medals, and rings.

"By the way, I am going to redeem them the first thing to-morrow!" said Madeline hurriedly.

"No, no, no, my dear Mrs. Wynne; such places for you are simply out of the question. I will go," protested Mr. Jessop, who had never been inside such an institution in his life.

"No, certainly not; they know me quite well at Cohen's, and you are a stranger. I don't mind one bit, as it will be for the last time; and why should it be more out of the question *now* than yesterday? Does money make such a difference in a few hours?" (Money sometimes makes a difference in a few minutes.)

. . . . . .

On the whole, Mr. Jessop approved. The scheme was rash, romantic, risky; but it was the only plan he could see for the present.

Mrs. Wynne must take her father in hand and talk him over. "He did not think she would have much trouble," he added consolingly, as he looked at her pretty, animated face; and he told himself that the old fellow must have indeed a rocky heart if he could resist that. And now for business, for action, for a council of war.

In a quarter of an hour it was all settled, so unanimous were Madeline and Mr. Jessop.

A great doctor, whose specialty was low fever, was to be summoned the next morning. If he consented, Mr. Jessop was to come in the afternoon with a very, very easy brougham, and take the invalid at once to Waterloo Station, and by rail and carriage to a farmhouse that he knew of, about fifty miles from London, where there was pure air, pure milk, and every incentive to health. The baby and Madeline were to follow

the next day, after everything had been packed up and stored with Mrs. Kane, who was now amenable to anything, and amiable to imbecility.

The prescribed journey did take place by luxurious and easy stages, and actually the next night Mr. Wynne passed under the red-tiled roof of the farm in Hampshire. He was worn out by fatigue, and slept well—slept till the crowing of the cocks and the lowing of the cows had announced, long previously, that the day was commenced for them. He sat in a lattice-paned sitting-room, looking into a sunny, old-fashioned garden (filled in summer with hollyhocks, sunflowers, roses, and lavender, and many sweet-scented flowers well beloved of bees), and felt better already, and made an excellent early dinner, although his portly hostess declared, as she carried the dishes into the kitchen, "that the poor sick gentleman—and ay, deary me, he do look bad—had no more appetite than a canary!"

The sick gentleman's wife and baby appeared on the scene in the course of the afternoon, "a rare tall, pretty young lady she were," quoth the farm folk. A country girl took charge of the infant, who, as long as he had plenty of milk in his bottle, and that bottle in his clutch, was fairly peaceable and contented with things in general; and was much taken with Mrs. Holt's cap frills, with her bright tin dishes on the kitchen shelves, and with various other new and strange objects.

Madeline was thankful to get into the peaceful country, with its placid green fields and bud-

ding hedges; to live in Farmer Holt's old red-roofed house, with the clipped yew trees in the sunny garden, and the big pool at the foot of it overshadowed by elder trees. Thankful to enjoy this haven of rest, away from murky London, with its roar of hurrying existence and deafening street traffic that never seemed to cease, night or day, in the neighborhood of Soiferino Place.

Here the lusty crowing of rival cocks, the lowing of cows, the noise of the churn, were the only sounds that broke a silence that was as impressive as it was refreshing. All things have an end. Madeline's three weeks' leave soon came to a conclusion; and she most reluctantly tore herself away from the farm, the evening before she was due at Harperton. How happy she was here! Why must she go?

Laurence was better, a great deal better. He walked in the garden, leaning on her arm at first, then in the lanes with no support but his stick. He was more hopeful, more like his former self—he was actually engaged in tying flies for Farmer Holt, as Madeline watched him wistfully, with her chin on her hand. She loved the farm itself — the farmer's wife (kind Mrs. Holt, with a heart to match her ample person). The sweet little chickens, and ducks, and calves, and foals, were all delightful to Madeline, who, active as ever, had helped to feed the former, learned to make butter, to make griddle-cakes, to milk, and was on foot from six in the morning until nine o'clock at night, and had recovered

the look of youth and well-being which had so long been missing from her appearance.

The farmer himself was to drive her to the station in his dog-cart, and she and Laurence strolled down the lane together to say a few last words ere they parted—for how long?

Laurence was hopeful now, and Madeline was tearfully despondent. He was recovering, and felt more self-reliance every day. He would soon, please God, be back at work.

"I don't know what has come over me, Laurence," said his wife, as they came to the gate and a full stop. "I feel so low, so depressed, something tells me that I shall not see you again for *ages*," her eyes filling with tears. "And I feel so nervous about meeting papa," and her lips quivered as she spoke.

"Nonsense, Maddie! you must never meet trouble half way. Your father cannot but be pleased with you, and when you tell him about me—"

"Oh, but I won't, I dare not at first," she interrupted hastily. "It all comes back to me now. The days in that big house in Toorak, and how I used to be afraid when I heard his voice in the entrance-hall—his voice when he was angry. I used to run away and hide under a bed!"

"Nevertheless, you must tell him, all the same; you are not a child now. And when you point out to him that his silence for two years and a half left you to a certain extent your own mistress, and that your unlucky marriage was

the result of the reins being thrown on your neck—"

"Now, Laurence!" putting her hand on his arm, "you know I won't listen to that; and if the worst comes to the worst, I can run away *again!*"

"So you can; and I think in another fortnight I shall be fit for—for harness. Jessop says—"

"If Mr. Jessop says anything so wicked, he and I will quarrel!" exclaimed Madeline, indignantly. "You are not to do anything for three months; there is plenty of money left yet."

"Yes; but, Maddie," producing some notes, "you know you can't appear before your father like that," pointing to her dress. "You will need a couple of decent gowns; and I don't think much of that hat. You must take forty pounds, without any nonsense, you know."

"No, I won't," pushing it away impatiently. "I don't require it."

"But you do, and must take it, and do as I desire you—goodness knows it's little enough! Promise me to spend every farthing on yourself. You ought to be respectably dressed when you meet your father. Where is your common sense? And naturally he will ask—Where is the hundred pounds he gave you for new frocks? Remember, Maddie, if he is *very* angry, you can always come back to me"—kissing her. "And now that I am not so down on my luck, I feel anxious to work for you, and the sooner the better; and the sooner you return the better. Here is Holt," as the farmer, driving a slashing long-

tailed colt, came quickly round the corner into view. "He is driving that crazy four-year-old! I hope he will take care of you. Mind you leave her there safely, farmer," as his nimble wife climbed up into the lofty dog-cart. "Good-by, Maddie; be sure you write to-morrow." Stepping aside as they dashed through the gate, carried forward by the impatient chestnut.

Madeline looked back, and waved her handkerchief. Yes, he was still standing gazing after them, even when they had gone quite a distance; finally she applied the handkerchief to her eyes.

"Now, don't take on so, ma'am," murmured the farmer, his eyes fixed on the colt's quivering ears. "We'll take good care of him! He is a real nice young gentleman; and as to baby, I don't see how the missis will ever part with him. You cheer up! Ain't you a-going to meet your father?"

"Yes, Mr. Holt," she faltered; "but I may as well tell you that he has not seen me for more than twelve years. He—I—we thought he was dead. He does not know that I am married!"

"Oh, great gooseberries!" ejaculated her listener, emphatically. "What a taking he'll be in!"

"No, and he is not to know just yet. I am Miss West, not Mrs. Wynne, until I have paved the way. I've told your wife all about it; she knows."

"I don't see what your father can have to say ag'in Mr. Wynne?" said Holt, stoutly. "He is a gentleman. The king himself is no more."

"Ah, yes; but he has no money," sighed Madeline.

"Maybe he has brains; and them does just as well. Don't let your father come between you —you know the Bible says, 'As—' "

"Mr. Holt!" she exclaimed, flushing indignantly, "do you think I would ever desert Laurence? No, not for fifty fathers. No, not if my father came all the way from London on his knees would I ever give up Laurence and baby, or forget them for one single hour!"

"Nay, I'm sure you wouldn't, excuse me, ma'am. But, you see, your father's very rich, and you are just wonderful pretty, and when the old gent—meaning no offense—has you living in a kind of palace, with servants, and carriages and 'osses, and tricked out in dress and jewels, and every one pushing and jostling one another to tell you what a grand and beautiful lady you be —why, maybe, *then* you won't be so keen for coming back; you know it would be only human nature—at least," coolly correcting himself— "woman's natur."

"Well, Mr. Holt," she returned rather stiffly, "time will tell. I cannot say more than that," unintentionally quoting from Mrs. Kane. "I know myself that I shall come back, and soon. Remember," stopping when she had jumped down, and holding his bony hand tightly in both of hers, "remember," she repeated, looking up into his honest, rugged face, with dim and wistful eyes, "I leave them in your charge. Don't let Laurence overtire himself—don't let him walk

too far. Don't let the baby have a halfpenny to play with again—or the toasting-fork. And, oh, I must go! Remember, above all, that I shall soon return."

Exit Miss West, running to take her ticket and claim her luggage; and Farmer Holt, fearing the effect of the train, for the first time, on his rampant colt, prudently turned his head back toward the cool green lanes without any dangerous delay.

CHAPTER XII

"SHE WILL DO!"

MADELINE, having arrived in London, drove direct to No. 2, and spent one more night under Mrs. Kane's roof, where she was received with open arms, and proudly shown a letter marked, "Private and confidential," and signed by the neat and respectable signature of "Letitia Harper."

"*I* answered her! Ay, my word, that I did!" cried Mrs. Kane, triumphantly. "She'll not come poking her nose after you again. I knew Miss West for a long time, I said, and nothing to her discredit. She was a most excellent, reliable young lady—who kept herself *to* herself: and should I mention as Miss Harper had kindly referred to me? *That* wor a poser, I can tell you! Back came a letter telling me on no account to say a word to Miss West, and inclosing a postal order for ten shillings for my *trouble!* That was a rare joke! the trouble was a pleasure. And how is Mr. Wynne? and how is the

dear baby?" continued Mrs. Kane, whose speech and affection were alike at high tide.

It was evident to Madeline herself that she must get some new clothes. She was not even wearing out the remains of her trousseau—never having had one. What would her father say to her faded cotton, and still more shabby serge? Even the eleven-and-ninepenny hat was now *passe*. Knowing, as he did, too, that she had the means to dress differently! She must spend money on her wardrobe without delay. Accordingly, after breakfast, she sallied forth, and went to a first-class establishment where a great sale was in its first frenzy. Here, among a mob of well-dressed ladies, she struggled for standing room, and waited for attendance, and saw dress after dress on which she had set her heart snatched away and sold. After patient endurance of heat, tempers, rudeness, and unblushing selfishness, she secured the attention of a harassed girl, who, perhaps feeling that she was even such a one as herself, assisted her to choose a neat covert coating, a tailor-made coat and skirt—a model costume of crêpon, with immense sleeves and a profusion of jet and black satin trimmings, also a black gauze evening gown—a once-exquisite garment, but now shockingly tumbled by ruthless hands, though it *was* a "Paris pattern."

These, with a smart silk blouse, a picture-hat, a cape, shoes, handkerchiefs, veils, and gloves, swallowed up twenty-five pounds. Then she returned with her parcels in a hansom, displayed

the contents (by request) to Mrs. Kane, and spent her evening in altering the bodices and packing her trunk: it was not very full. It did not need any one to come and sit on the top and press the lock together. Next morning she was en route to Riverside, and that same evening in Mrs. Harper's arms!

Mrs. Harper and her daughter were delighted to see her. The house was empty; the girls had gone home for the Easter holidays, and they would be very cozy and comfortable. They asked many veiled and clever questions anent her money. What had she done with it? Surely she had not spent it *all?* How much was the tailor-made? How much was the black? But she gave them no satisfactory answer. That was *her* affair, and not in the bond.

Days passed, and yet no sign of Mr. West, and Mrs. Harper was becoming a little impatient and irritable. Could he mean to disappear for a second time? What was she to think?

Meanwhile Madeline wrote to the farm daily, posting the letters herself. Here is one of them as a specimen:

"My dear Laurence—No news yet. So glad to get your letters. I call for them every day. It looks funny to see nothing but W. on the envelope, but it would never do to put West, much less Wynne. It makes me very happy to hear that you and baby are getting on so well and are making the best of this lovely weather. How I wish I was back with you—ten—fifty

times a day—strolling about the lanes and fields among the lambs and primroses, instead of being cooped up here, in this hot, dusty suburb. You must not do too much! How dare you walk to the top of Brownwood Hill! It is just four times too far. How could the Holts allow you to be so foolish? But I'm afraid you don't mind *them*. You ask what *I* am doing? I am trying hard to make believe that I am Madeline West once more. Don't be shocked, my dear Laurence, but at times I succeed admirably, especially when I sit down to an hour's practicing on the schoolroom piano. I am getting up my music and singing again, and working very hard, so that my father won't be disappointed as far as my voice is concerned. I have looked over the new books that the girls had last half in the first class—horrible essays and lectures and scientific articles—about the glacial periods, and shooting stars, such as I abhor, and *you* love; but I know that I ought to read up, for I am a shameful ignoramus. I, however, enjoy rubbing up my French, and have devoured several most delicious books by Gyp. Miss Harper lent them to me. She said, now that I had left school, I might read them. I asked her—just to see how she would look—if she had any of Émile Zola's. I had heard so much of them. She nearly fainted, and said, 'My dear, you must never even mention that man's *name!*' I have learned to dress my hair in the new style. I've gone shopping with Miss Harper. Altogether I've been very busy, and when I sit in

my old place at meal-times, and stare at the familiar wall-paper, and familiar cups and saucers, and when I listen to the Harpers' well-known little sayings and turns of speech, when I look out of the windows, or sit alone in the schoolroom, as I used formerly to do in holiday times, I honestly declare that I feel as if all about you was a dream, and that I cannot bring myself to realize that I have ever left school at all. You see I am naturally a very adaptable creature; I drop into a groove at once, and accommodate myself to circumstances. For instance, Mr. Holt said I was born to be a farmer's wife! I have lived here for so many, many years that I fall straight back into my old place. Then I rouse up and go off to the post-office, when the second post is due, and receive one of your welcome letters; and I know that I am not dreaming, but that I am actually married. Oh, Laurence, I sometimes look at the Harpers and say to myself—If they knew! I wish that this waiting was over! I wish my father would come! This delay makes me so nervous and so jumpy. It's like sitting in a dentist's drawing-room! I sincerely hope that anticipation will prove to be the worst part of the business. Miss Harper is coming. I hear her heavy step! No —I breathe again. Only fancy, she asked me yesterday, with one of her old sharp looks, *whom* I was always writing to? and I was fortunate to have so many friends—such wonderful correspondents! With a kind of sneer, then, she said, 'I'm going out, and I may as well post

your letter,' but I need not tell you that I declined her amiable offer, and posted it myself. You say that baby screams at night, and must be consigned to an outhouse, if he continues to make night hideous. How inhuman of you, Laurence, to write such horrid things, even in joke! Do you think he could possibly be missing *me*, or is this a foolish idea with respect to an infant of five months old? Ask Mrs. Holt to feel his gums. Perhaps it is a tooth? And now good-by, with many kisses to him, and kind remembrances to the Holts.

"I am, your loving wife,

"M. W."

Very shortly after this letter was dispatched Mrs. Harper received a telegram from the agents to say that the "Ophir" was expected at Plymouth the next afternoon.

What a fuss ensued, what rushing and running and packing, and calling for twine and luggage labels, and leather straps and sandwiches, on the part of an excited spinster, who was enchanted at the prospect of a jaunt down to Devonshire—all expenses paid. Once fairly off, and away from her own familiar beat, she was little better than a child. It was not Miss Harper who looked after Madeline, but Madeline who took care of her. At every big station she was seized with a panic, and called out, "Porter, where are we now? How long do we stop? Do we change? Is the luggage all right?" Her fussy flight to the refreshment-rooms, and fran-

tic dashes back to the carriage—usually the wrong one—was amusing to her fellow-travelers, but not to Madeline; and, besides this, her shrill and constant chatter about "your father," "I do hope the 'Ophir' won't be late," "she is a splendid steamer, 10,000-horse power," "and I hope they have had a good passage," made her former pupil feel a keen desire to say something cross, knowing that Miss Harper imagined that she was impressing the other inmates of the carriage, but in reality was making herself supremely ridiculous.

Madeline was thankful when they were safely housed (luggage and all) in the best hotel in Plymouth. Miss Harper had only forgotten her umbrella in the train, and lost a considerable share of her temper in consequence, but a good dinner and a good night's rest made this all right, and she wore a smiling face as she and her charge and many other people went down the next morning to board the newly-arrived Orient Liner "Ophir."

To a stranger it was a most bewildering scene, and Miss Harper and Madeline stared about them helplessly; but of course the new arrivals were readily singled out by the passengers, and Mr. West had no hesitation whatever in promptly selecting the prettiest girl who had come up the side as his own daughter.

It would have been a severe blow to his penetration and self-esteem had he been wrong, but it so happened that he was right.

And now, before introducing him to Madeline,

let us pause and take a little sketch of Robert West, millionaire, who had made considerable capital out of the fact, and taken the lead socially during the recent voyage, from whist and deck-quoits to the usual complimentary letter to the captain. He is a man of fifty-five, or a little more, short, spare, dapper, with a thin face, hair between fair and gray, quick bright hazel eyes, a carefully trimmed short beard, and waxed mustache. There are a good many deep wrinkles about his eyes, and when he raises his cap he no longer looks (as he does otherwise, and at a short distance) a man of five-and-thirty, but his full age, for we perceive that his head is as bald as a billiard ball. (N.B.—His photographs are invariable taken in his hat.) He is dressed in the most approved manner, and by the best tailor in Melbourne; a fat little nugget hangs from his watch-chain; a perennial smile adorns his face, although he has a singularly hard and suspicious eye. His history and antecedents may be summed up in a few sentences: His father, an English yeoman of a respectable old stock, committed forgery, and was transported to Port Philip in 1823; he got a ticket-of-leave, acquired land, squatted, married in Port Philip, now Victoria. His success was fitful, owing to drought, scab, and the many other evils to which an Australian settler is heir. However, he gave his son a fairly good education in England. He desired him to make a figure as a gentleman. To this end he pinched and struggled and scraped, and finally sent Robert down to Melbourne with a certain

sum of money, and a stern determination to grapple with and conquer fortune. Privately Robert despised his horny-handed old father, the ex-convict. He hated a squatter's life—loathed dingoes, dampers, buck-jumpers, and wool, and he soon fell into a comfortable berth in a land-agent's office, and being steady, capable, hard-headed (and hard-hearted), prospered rapidly; in his young days everything in Melbourne was of Tropical growth.

He married a veritable hot-house flower—his employer's only daughter—a pretty, indolent, excitable, extravagant creature, with French blood in her veins, who carried him up a dozen rungs of the social ladder, and brought him a fortune. Her house—in Toorak—her splendid dresses, entertainments, and equipages were the talk and envy of her neighbors and sex; she was in with the Government House set, and she lived in an incessant round of gayety, a truly brilliant butterfly.

After six years of married life, she died of consumption; and her widower was not inconsolable. He kept on the big house, he frequented his club, he heaped up riches, he gambled with selections as others do with cards; he was not behind-hand in the great land boom which led to that saturnalia of wild speculation which demoralized the entire community. Suburban lands were forced up to enormous prices—a thousand times their value; people bought properties in the morning and sold them in the afternoon at an advance of thousands of pounds. New suburbs,

new banks, new tenements sprang up like mushrooms, under the influence of adventurous building societies, and every one was making an enormous fortune—on paper.

When the gigantic bubble burst, the consequences were terrible, involving the ruin of thousands. Robert West had seen that the crash must come, but believed that *he* would escape. He tempted fortune too rashly. Just a few more thousands, and he would sell out; but his greed was his bane. He had not time to stand from under when the whole card house toppled over and his fortunes fell.

He was left almost penniless: the banks had collapsed, land and estate was unsalable. He was at his wits' end. He seriously contemplated suicide, but after all decided to see the thing out —that is his own life. He went to Sydney; he kept his head above water; he looked about keenly for a plank of security, and providence—luck—threw him one. Land he had taken with grumbling reluctance as part payment of an ancient debt—land he had never been within five hundred miles of—proved to be a portion of the celebrated Waikatoo gold mines. He was figuratively and literally on the spot at once; his old trade stood to him. He traded, and sold, and realized, keeping a certain number of shares, and then turned his back on Greater Britain forever, intending to enjoy life and to end his days in Britain the Less. Money was his dear and respected friend; he loved it with every fiber of his little shriveled heart. Ambition was his rul-

ing passion, and rank his idol. To rank he would abase himself and grovel in the gutter; to rank he intends to be allied before he is much older—if not in his own proper person, he will at least be the father-in-law of a peer. Money for the attainment of this honor was no object; and as his sharp, eager eyes fell on the pretty frightened face that was looking diffidently round the many groups standing on the deck of the steamer, he told himself, with a thrill of ecstasy, "That if that girl in the black hat is Madeline—by Jove! she will do!"

CHAPTER XIII

MR. WEST'S WISHES

STANDING close to Mr. West—or, rather, Mr. West had attached himself to him—was his favorite fellow-traveler, a young and somewhat impecunious nobleman—Lord Anthony Foster—the son of a duke, whose pedigree was much longer than his purse, and one of a large family. Most of this family were already established in life, and had repaired their shattered fortunes by a prudent and wealthy marriage; but Lord Tony, as he was called, preferred his liberty. He was fond of sport and traveling, and was postponing the evil day (as he considered it) which, alas! must sooner or later overtake him, for his private fortune was small. His elder brother, the present duke, was close-fisted, and his personal expenses, do as he would, invariably exceeded his expectations—it is a little way they have with many people—and although he had no extravagant tastes (so he declared), yet he was liberal, and liked to "do things comfortably." In his appearance no one would suspect

that the blood of a hundred earls ran in his veins; in fact (low be it whispered), he was a rather common-looking young man — short, square, with a turned-up nose, wide nostrils, a wide mouth, and a faint light mustache; his complexion was tanned to mahogany, but a pair of merry blue eyes, and an open, good-humored countenance made up for many deficiencies. He was not a ladies' man, but popular with men; not at all clever, but ever ready to laugh at other folks' good things and his own mistakes—shrewd enough, too; a capital shot, an untiring angler, an enterprising traveler, and, according to his own account, an unparalleled sleeper. He had no profession, no ties, no landed estates to look after—the world was his landed estate—and he was now returning from a long tour of inspection in Japan and Australia.

Lord Tony had met Mr. West in Sydney society, and Mr. West had taken an immense fancy to him, and had privately arranged the date of his own departure so as to secure the young lord as a fellow-passenger. He had also shared his cabin. In this unaffected young man, with a pleasant, hearty manner, and a large connection in the peerage, he saw a link to upper circles, and a ready ladder for his nimble and ambitious foot.

Mr. West was determined to get into society, to enjoy his money, to be in the swim, and to make a splash! He had obtained one or two good introductions to merchant princes, and he had cemented a fast friendship with Lord Tony.

Friendships grow quickly at sea, though these same friendships frequently languish and fade on shore. He had frequently and pointedly alluded to "his only child," "his daughter," "his little heiress;" he had displayed with pride the photograph of a very charming girl in her early teens; he had thrown out hints that if she married to please *him*—a nice, unaffected, well-connected young fellow, who would give her a coronet on her handkerchief—the money to spend and keep up her position would be *his* affair.

Lord Tony's married brothers and sisters were continually and clamorously urging heiresses upon his notice; it was "his only chance," they assured him. "He must marry money." If this pretty girl now speaking to West, with visible trepidation and becomingly heightened color, was the heiress he was always swaggering about and dragging into his conversation, Lord Tony told himself, as he took his cigarette out of his mouth and blew away a cloud of smoke, "that, by George! he might do worse." And so he might. Presently he was formally introduced to the young lady and her companion, and Mr. West, who was metaphorically carried off his feet by Madeline's unexpected grace, was in a condition of rampant satisfaction. *She* would go down. She would take anywhere; and actually, for a few lofty seconds, he scorned a mere lord, and saw a wreath of strawberry leaves resting on her pretty dark hair.

Miss Harper was not slow to read the signs of the times—to interpret the expression of the mil-

lionaire's growing complacency: he found Madeline prettier than he had anticipated; he was greatly pleased; and she immediately improved the occasion, and murmured a few well-timed words into his ear about "dearest Madeline's air of distinction, her exquisitely shaped head, her vivacity, her remarkable beauty; fitted to adorn any sphere; always a favorite pupil; a most accomplished, popular girl;" while Madeline gravely answered Lord Anthony's blunt questions. He was the first lord she had ever spoken to, and, as far as she could judge, neither formidable nor imposing.

After a little she found herself being led up and presented to the captain and to several of the passengers, with a look and tone that told even Madeline, who had a very humble opinion of herself, that her father was exceedingly proud of her!

"Oh, if he would only be kind—only be good to her! if her pretty face, that he appeared to value so much, would but open the door of his heart, and admit her and Laurence and his grandchild! But it would not. Do not think it, simple Madeline; it will only admit you in company with a peer of the realm.

After much fuss and bustle, Mr. West and his party disembarked. Never in all her life had Madeline been so much stared at. And she was not merely looked at curiously—as a pretty girl who had never seen her father since she was a child—she was doubly interesting as a great heiress, and a very marketable young person.

She was not sorry to make her escape, and was conducted down the gangway in a kind of triumphal procession, led by her exultant parent, her arm on his, while Miss Harper followed, leaning on Lord Anthony—who was to be Mr. West's guest at his hotel—and I have no hesitation in affirming that this was the happiest moment of Miss Harper's life, if it was not that of her pupil's (as to this latter I cannot speak with certainty). Arm-in-arm with a lord! What would people say at home when she went back? Her heart already beat high with anticipation of the sensation she would produce upon the minds of her particular circle. If one of them could only see her! But there is always an "if."

Mr. West was rather indisposed after his voyage. He could not sleep, he declared; he missed the engines; and he remained at Plymouth for a few days. So did Lord Anthony, who was in no particular hurry. Miss Harper had reluctantly taken leave, and returned to Harperton, endowed with a valuable present "for all her kindness to Madeline," quoth Mr. West, as he presented it with considerable pomp, and this offering she graciously and modestly accepted—yes, without the quivering of an eyelid, much less the ghost of a blush! Perhaps, so crooked are some people's ideas, she had brought herself to believe that she *had* been kind to Madeline—and, indeed, she had never been as hard as Miss Selina. She would have liked to have remained at this luxurious hotel a few days longer. Everything was done *en prince*. A carriage and pair,

a really smart turnout (cockades and all), took them for a delightful drive. There were excursions to Mount Edgecumbe, promenades on the Hoe. Plymouth was gay, the weather was magnificent, Lord Anthony Foster of the party—and so amusing! Miss Harper was easily amused sometimes. She threw out one or two hints to Mr. West to the effect that she was excessively comfortable, that this little visit was quite too delightful—an oasis in her existence; that mamma was not lonely—in short, that she dreaded parting with her dearest pupil; but nevertheless she had to go. Mr. West was ruthless, he was blunt; he was, moreover, wonderfully keen at interpreting other people's motives. He perfectly understood Miss Harper. She was, no doubt, very much at her ease; but he owed her nothing. She had been amply paid; she had had his girl for twelve years, and could afford to part with her young charge.

Moreover, Miss Harper did not belong to the class of people he particularly wished to cultivate —that was sufficient—and he smilingly sped the parting guest, after a four days' visit. During those four days Madeline had been installed as mistress of her father's establishment, and was endeavoring to accustom herself to her new role. Everything was deferred to her, the ordering of dinner, the ordering of carriages, and of various items that meant a considerable outlay. She took up her position at once with a composure that astonished her school-mistress. She stared at Madeline in amazement, as she sat at the head

of the table in her new black gauze, and comported herself as though she had occupied the post for years.

In about a week's time the Wests (still accompanied by Lord Anthony) went to London, staying at the Metropole Hotel; and here Mr. West, who was a brisk man of action, and resolved to lose not an hour in enjoying his money and realizing his plans, set about house-hunting, con amore, assuring delighted house agents that price was no consideration—what he sought was size, style, and situation.

Under these favorable circumstances, he soon discovered what he required. A superb mansion in Belgrave Square, with large suites of reception-rooms, twenty bedrooms, hot and cold water, electric light, speaking-tubes, stabling for twelve horses, and, in short, to quote the advertisement, "with everything desirable for a nobleman's or gentleman's family." It had just been vacated by a marquis, which made it still more desirable to Mr. West. If not near the rose, the rose had lived there! Indeed, to tell the happy truth, a duke resided next door, and an embassador round the corner. So far so good. The next thing was to be neighborly. Then there was the business of furnishing—of course regardless of cost. Days and days were spent, selecting, measuring, matching, and discussing at one of the most fashionable upholsterers in town, and the result was most satisfactory, most magnificent, and most expensive. There was a dining-room hung with ancestors—Charles

Surface's, perhaps—but certainly not Mr. West's. A full-length portrait of his father in prison dress would have been a startling novelty; there was an ante-room in turquoise blue, a drawing-room in yellow and white, and a boudoir in rose and pearl-color brocade. Of the delights of these apartments, of the paintings, statuary, bronzes, and Chinese curios, of the old silver and china and ivory work, and pianos and Persian carpets, it would take a book to catalogue.

As for Madeline, accustomed, as we know, to four Windsor chairs, two tables, a shabby rag of Kidderminster carpet, and a horsehair sofa with a lame leg, her brain was giddy as she endeavored to realize that she was to be mistress of these treasures, and to preside over this palatial establishment. Carriages and horses found places in stables and coach-houses; a troop of well-trained servants populated the house. There was a stately lady housekeeper, a French chef, a French maid for Madeline, three footmen in mulberry and silver buttons, and a butler whom one might have mistaken for a dean, and whose deportment and dignity were of such proportions as to overawe all timid natures, and of very high value in his master's eyes.

Madeline shrank from her lady's maid, but she was a necessity—noblesse oblige. She did not wish the sharp-eyed Parisienne to spy out the nakedness of the land, as far as her own wardrobe was concerned, and was at many a shift to postpone her arrival until she had garments more befitting her background and her father's purse.

Indeed, he had not been pleased with her gowns, "they looked cheap," he had remarked with a frown.

"Is that all you have, Madeline, that black thing?" he asked rather querulously one evening, as they stood in the drawing-room awaiting Lord Anthony and a friend.

"Yes, papa; and it is nearly new," she said in a tone of deprecation. "It does very well for the present, and I must wear it out."

"Wear out! Stuff and nonsense!" irritably. "One would think you had a shingle loose. I really sometimes fancy, when I hear you talking of the price of this and that, and so on, and *economy*, that you have known what it is to be poor —poor as Job! Whereas, by George! you have never known what it is to want for a single thing ever since you were born. You have as much idea of poverty as your prize black poodle has!"

Had she? Had she not known what it was to frequent pawnshops, to battle with wolfish want, to experience not merely the pleasures of a healthy appetite, but the actual pangs of painful hunger. Oh, had she not known what it was to be poor! She gave a little half-choked nervous laugh, and carefully avoided her father's interrogative eyes.

"I'll give you a check to-morrow," he resumed, "and do go to some good dressmaker, and get yourself some smart clothes. Lady Rachel, Lord Tony's sister, is going to call; ask her to take you to some first-class place, and choose half-a-dozen gowns. I really mean it;

and put this thing," flicking her fifty-shilling costume with a contemptuous finger and thumb, "behind the fire. You are not like your mother; *she* made the money fly. However, she was always well turned out. I don't want you to ruin me; but there is a medium in all things. What is the good of a daughter who is a beauty if she won't set herself off?"

"Do you *really* think me pretty, father?" she asked, rather timidly.

"Why, of course I do! We shall have you setting the fashions and figuring in the papers, and painted full life-size, when you have more assurance, and know how to make the most of yourself. Remember this," now giving his collar a chuck, and speaking with sudden gravity, "that when you marry"—Madeline blushed—"when you marry, I say," noticing this blush, "you must go into the peerage; nothing else would suit *me*, never forget that. Now that you know my views, there can be no misunderstandings later on. Never send a commoner to ask for my consent."

"But, father," she ventured boldly, now raising her eyes to his, that surveyed her like two little fiery brown beads, "supposing that I loved a poor man, what then? How would it be then?"

"Folly!" he almost yelled. "Poor man. Poor devil! Love! rot and nonsense, bred from reading trashy novels. Love a poor man! Do you want to drive me mad? Never mention it, never think of it, if I am to keep my senses." And he began to pace about.

"But," she answered resolutely, pressing her fan very hard into the palm of her trembling hand, "supposing that I did? Why should I not?—*you* married my mother for love."

"Not a bit of it," he rejoined emphatically, "I liked her, admired her; she was very pretty, and had blue blood—foreign blood—in her veins, but she was a good match. She had a fine fortune, she was in the best set. Her father took me into partnership. I was a rising man—and—er—I know all about love; *I* have been through the mill! Ha, ha, it's bad while it lasts, but it does *not* last! The woman I loved was a little girl from Tasmania, without a copper. She tempted me mightily, but I knew I might just as well cut my throat at once. No, I married for good and sensible reasons, and one word will do as well as ten. If you ever make a low marriage, a love match with a pauper, or throw yourself and your beauty and your accomplishments, and all I've done for you, and all my hopes away, I solemnly declare to you that I shall not hesitate to turn you penniless into the street. I swear I will do it, and never own you again. You might go and die in the poorhouse, and I'd never raise a finger to save you from a pauper's funeral."

He spoke very fast, his voice uneven and vibrating with passion, his face livid at the mere idea of his schemes being foiled. He was terribly in earnest; his very look made Madeline quail. She trembled and turned pale, as she thought of poor Laurence.

"It's not much I ask you to do for *me*, is it,

Maddie, after all I've done for you?" he continued in a softer key. "I have my ambitions, like other men, and all my ambition is for *you*. Give up all thoughts of your lover—that is, if you have one—and be an obedient daughter. It's not so much to do for me, after all."

Was it not! Little he knew!

"Promise me one thing, Madeline," he continued once more, breathing in hard gasps, and seizing her ice-cold hand in his hot dry grip.

"What is that, father?" she asked in a whisper.

"That you will never marry without my consent, and never listen to a commoner. Will you promise me this? Can you promise this?"

"Yes, father, I can," she answered, steadily looking him full in the eyes, with a countenance as white as marble.

"On your honor, Madeline?"

"On my honor!" she echoed in a curious, mechanical voice.

"Very well, then," inwardly both relieved and delighted; "that is what I call a model daughter. You shall have a prize. I will get you some diamonds to-morrow that will open people's eyes; no trumpery little half-set, but a necklet, tiara, and brooches. I saw a *parure* to-day, old family jewels. Hard up—selling off; one goes up, another comes down, like a see-saw. It's our turn now! You shall wear stones that will make people blink—diamonds that will be the talk of London. If folks say they are too handsome for an unmarried girl, that is our affair,

and a coronet will mend that. You have a head that will carry one well. Your mother's blue blood shows. You shall pick and choose, too. Lord Anthony may think—"

"Lord Anthony Foster and Sir Felix Gibbs," said a sonorous voice.

And what Lord Anthony might think was never divulged to Madeline; Mr. West, with great presence of mind, springing with one supreme mental leap from family matters to social courtesies.

The dinner was perfect, served at a round table. The floral decorations were exquisite; attendance, menu, wines were everything that could be desired. The gentlemen talked a good deal—talked of the turf, the prospect of the moors, of the latest failure in the city, and the latest play, and perhaps did not notice how very little the young hostess contributed to the conversation. She was absent in mind, if present in the body; but she smiled, and looked pretty, and that was sufficient. She was beholding with her mental eye a very different *menage*, far beyond the silver center-pieces, pines, maiden-hair ferns and orchids, far beyond the powdered footmen, with their dainty dishes and French *entrees*.

We know what she saw. A cozy farm parlor, with red-tiled floor, a round table spread with a clean coarse cloth, decorated by a blue mug, filled with mignonette and sweet pea, black-handled knives and forks, willow-pattern delf plates, a young man eating his frugal dinner

alone, and opposite to him an empty chair—*her* chair. She saw in another room a curious old wooden cradle, with a pointed half-roof, which had rocked many a Holt in its day. Inside it lay a child that was not a Holt, a child of a different type, a child with black lashes, and a feeding-bottle in its vicinity. (Now, Mrs. Holt's progeny had never been brought up by hand.) *Her* baby! Oh, if papa were only to know! she thought, and the idea pierced her heart like a knife, as she looked across at him, where he sat smiling, conversational, and unsuspicious. He would turn her out now this very instant into the Square, were he to catch a glimpse of those two living pictures. He was unusually animated on the subject of some shooting he had heard of, and he had two attentive and, shall we confess it, personally interested listeners—listeners who had rosy visions of shooting the grouse on those very moors, as Mr. West's guests.

So, for a while, Madeline was left to her own thoughts, and they traveled back to her earliest married days, the pleasant little sitting-room on the first floor at No. 2, the bright fires, bright flowers, new music, and cozy dinners (the mutton-chop period), when all her world was bounded by Laurence. Was it not still the case? Alas, no! The bald-headed gentleman opposite, who was haranguing about "drives and bags," held a bond on her happiness. He had to be studied, obeyed, and—deceived! Would she be able to play her part? Would she break down? When

he looked at her, as he had done that evening, her heart failed her. She felt almost compelled to sink at his feet and tell him all. It was well she had restrained herself. She resolved to save for a rainy day some of the money he was to give her on the morrow. Yes, the clouds were beginning to gather, even now.

Oh, what a wicked wretch she felt at times! But why had cruel fate pushed her into such a corner? Why was her father so worldly and ambitious? Why had she failed to put forward Laurence's plea, his own long absence and silence, and thus excuse herself once for all? Easy to say this now, when that desperate moment was over—it is always so easy to say these things afterward! She had given her father a solemn promise (and oh, what a hollow promise it was!), and she was to receive her reward in diamonds of the first water—diamonds that would blind the ordinary and unaccustomed eye!

Presently she rose, and made her way slowly to her great state drawing-rooms, and as she sipped her coffee she thought of Laurence, and wondered what he was doing, and when she dared to see him, to write? Poor Laurence! how seedy his clothes were; and how much his long illness had altered his looks. With his hollow cheeks and cropped head (his head had been shaved), none of his former friends would recognize him. Then her thoughts wandered to her diamonds. She stood up and surveyed herself in the long mirror, and smiled back slightly at her own tall, graceful reflection. Diamonds

always looked well in dark hair. She was but little more than nineteen, and had the natural feminine instinct for adornment. She smiled still more radiantly; and what do we hear her saying in a whisper, and with a rapid stealthy glance round the room? It is this: "I wonder how you will look in a diamond tiara, Mrs. Wynne?"

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CHAPTER XIV

A SOCIAL GODMOTHER

THE next day Lord Tony's only sister, Lady Rachel Jenkins, arrived to call—but not for the first time—upon Miss West. She was an extremely vivacious and agreeable little woman, with dark eyes and flashing teeth. She took Madeline out with her in her own brougham, and oh, great favor! introduced her to her pet dressmaker. This august person viewed Miss West's stone-colored costume with an air of amused contempt; it was not good style; the cut of the skirt was quite "out," and she finally wound up by uttering the awful words, "Ready made." It was not what Madeline liked, or even thought she would like, but what Lady Rachel suggested and Madame Coralie approved, that was selected.

"Your father, my dear," patting the girl's hand confidentially, "met me on the stairs, and we had a few words together. I'm going to show you what we do in London, and what we wear, and whom we know; and what we don't

wear, and whom we don't know, my little country mouse!"

So the country mouse was endowed with half-a-dozen fine dresses chosen entirely by Lady Rachel—dresses for morning, afternoon, and evening.

"I only order six, my dear," said her chaperon, cheerily, "as the season is getting over, and these will carry you on till August, if you have a good maid. Madame Coralie, we can only give you five days," rising as she spoke.

But Madame Coralie threw up eyes and hands and gesticulated, and volubly declared that it was *absolument impossible!* She had so many gowns for Ascot and the royal garden party. Nevertheless, Lady Rachel was imperious, and carried her point.

"The opera mantle is to be lined with pink brocade, and you will line the cloth skirt with shot sulphur-colored silk; and that body I chose is to be almost drowned in chiffon and silver."

She was to be female bear-leader to this young heiress, and was resolved that her appearance should not disgrace her, and that "the old squatter," as she called him, should be taken at his word and made to pay and look pleasant.

The succeeding visit was to a milliner's; the next to a shoe shop, when the same scene was rehearsed. Madeline looked on and said nothing, but made an angry mental note that she would never again go out shopping with this imperious little lady. Why, even the poorest had the privilege of choosing their own clothes!

Why should this little black-browed woman, barely up to her shoulder, tyrannize over her thus? Simply because, my dear, unsophisticated Madeline, she has promised to bring you out—to be your social godmother, to introduce you to society, such as your father loveth, and to be friendly. Besides all this, she has already decided in her own mind that "you will do very well," and are not nearly as rustic as she expected; and she has made up her mind—precisely as she did about your satin dinner-dress—that you are to marry her brother. Oh, happy prospect!

Lady Rachel was Lord Anthony's only sister—a woman of five-and-thirty, who, thirteen years previously, had married a rich parvenu—plain, homely, much older than herself—for his money. She had no fortune as Lady Rachel Foster, and she was not particularly pretty; so she made the best available use of her title, and changed it for twenty thousand a year and the name of Jenkins. Mr. Jenkins liked being announced as "Lady Rachel, and Mr. Jenkins;" to be asked in a loud voice, in public places, "How is your wife—Lady Rachel?" For her part, she liked her fine house, servants, carriages, and jewels; and both were, to a certain extent, satisfied with their bargain. Perhaps of late years there had been a certain amount of disappointment. Lady Rachel went more and more into society, and drifted widely apart from Mr. Jenkins and his City friends. Mr. Jenkins was not considered an acquisition in her circles,

which were a little rapid. He was given to understand—by deeds, not words—that he was rather a bore, and that he must not always be expecting to be tied to the tail of his brilliant, fashionable, frivolous little wife—and then, Mr. Jenkins was jealous!

It was quite time that Anthony was married, thought his sister. He was not prepossessing in appearance. He was well known in society, and especially in her own set, as a fellow with an empty head, empty pockets, and a roving nature. He was not popular. She was aware that he had been rejected by heiress after heiress. He would not be modest and content with a plain girl, or an elderly widow, or even a faded spinster on the shady side of forty! No; Lord Anthony Foster must have beauty and money to boot, and there was no bidding for his coronet in the quarters these came from. Prudent mammas had set a mark against his name, and where his attentions would have been welcomed, he turned up his nose, and talked in a high moral manner about the sin of marrying one's grandmother. His affectionate sister had vainly suggested one or two ladies that she had thought suitable, but until now Lord Tony had been too *difficile*, and her pains had gone for nothing.

But now, oh, joy at last, he had found a girl almost, as one might say, to order—young, accomplished, ladylike, very pretty, and very rich.

Lady Rachel already considered Madeline her sister-in-law, and had already selected her own gown for the wedding, so far ahead do some ac-

tive, imaginative natures throw their mental life. There was nothing to wait for. Tony was willing—the old squatter was willing—and the girl—well, she was willing, of course.

Madame Coralie's dresses came home punctually, and were all that the most fastidious could desire, in fit, style, color, and cut. Madeline spent the whole afternoon, in the retirement of her own room, slowly trying on all six, one after the other, with ever-increasing approbation. The climax was an oyster-white satin, with a turquoise velvet and silver bodice—a dream of a dress, to quote the enraptured Josephine.

Madeline had an æsthetic appreciation of herself as she stood before a glass and contemplated the slim figure, white rounded arms, the rich glistening skirt, the exquisitely molded bodice. Could this apparition be the same young woman who had humbled herself before Mrs. Kane, and carried up her own coals? What a difference dress made—in self-respect and self-importance! Dress, as she now realized it, was a powerful engine in cultivating one's own self-esteem. Yes, a silk-lined skirt could impart a surprising amount of confidence! She glanced over one shoulder, then over the other, then looked full at her reflection, and said to herself, with a smile, "I do love pretty clothes!"

CHAPTER XV

MR. JESSOP DOES HIS DUTY

Lady Rachel and Madame Coralie, between them, soon metamorphosed the appearance of Miss West. She took to her elegant dresses and mantles and tea-gowns with astonishing facility; also to her landau and pair, victoria and cobs, diamonds, dignities, and the last fashion in dogs —a Chinese spaniel. It was not a specimen of animal she especially admired; but her father paid a long price for Chow-chow, because he was the rage, and he looked well on the back seat of the victoria. Yes, Madeline was remarkably adaptable; she developed a predilection for all the sensual accessories of color and perfume. She also developed a fastidious taste at table, and a rare talent for laying out money.

And what of Laurence Wynne during the time that his wife is reveling in luxury?

He has been making rapid strides on the road to recovery; he is almost well; and the end of his sojourn with the friendly farmer's family is now drawing perceptibly near. He has letters from Madeline, as she finds means to post them

with her own hands—letters full of descriptions of her new life, her new friends, and all the wonderful new world that has been opened to her view.

She, who was never at a dance, excepting at the two breaking-up parties at Mrs. Harper's, has been living in a round of gayety, which has whirled faster and faster as the season waned—thanks to Lady Rachel's introductions and chaperonage; thanks to her beauty, and her father's great wealth.

Miss West has already become known—already her brilliant coloring and perfect profile have been noted by great and competent connoisseurs. Her face was already familiar in the park.

Luckily for her, dark beauties were coming into fashion; in every way she was fortunate. Her carriage was pointed out in the Row; her table was littered with big, square monogramed envelopes and cards of invitation, far too numerous for acceptance. And Miss West, the Australian heiress, as she was called, had opened many doors by that potent pass-key, a pretty face, and admitted not only herself, but also her proud and happy parent.

Madeline does not say all this in so many long sentences to Laurence; not that he would be jealous, dear fellow! She knows him better than that; but she is sensible that there is a certain incongruity between their circumstances just at present, and she will not enlarge on her successes more than is absolutely needful. Yet a word drops out here and slips in there, which tells Laurence far more than she supposes. Besides

this, Laurence is no fool. He can draw inferences; he can put two and two together—it is his profession. Moreover, he sees the daily, society, and illustrated papers, thanks to Mr. Jessop, who has given a liberal order to his news-agent, believing that his gifted friend, who always lived at high brain-pressure, must be developing into a state of coma in his rural quarters, among cows and pigs and geese.

Laurence reads the letters between the lines. He reads society's doings, and in the warm June and July evenings, as he strolls about the fields alone, has plenty of leisure for reflection. These are not very happy times for Laurence Wynne. He has found some consolation in work. One or two articles from his pen have made their way into leading reviews, and been praised for their style, substance, and wit. A short sketch of a country tragedy has added another feather to his cap. In these long, lonely, empty days he has given ample time and brain-work (his best) to these vivid articles, readily scanned in a quarter of an hour. They recalled his name; at any rate, people began to remember Laurence Wynne—a clever chap who made a foolish marriage, and subsequently lived in a slum, and then nearly went and died. Apparently, he was not dead yet! There was a good deal of vitality in him still, and that of a very marketable description. Success, however small, breeds success, and a little sun began to shine on Laurence Wynne at last. He was asked to contribute articles to the "Razor" and the "Present," two

of the most up-to-date periodicals. He was well paid—cash down. He was independent once more, and he felt as if he would like to go out into the fields and shout for joy.

Now and then he ventured to write to his wife—to Miss West, 365 Belgrave Square; and Miss West eagerly snatches the letter from under a pile of society notes, in thick, fashionable envelopes, plunges it into her pocket, and reads it greedily alone; for although she is a little bit carried away by admiration, money, and power, yet a letter from Laurence puts all these pleasures completely into the shade, as yet.

This is his last that she holds in her hand, written after long meditation, and with many a pause between the sentences. He had turned out an article for the "Razor" in half the time.

"Holt Hill Farm.

"MY DEAREST MADELINE—Your welcome letter is at present lying before me; and now that the household is asleep, and that there is not a stir on the premises, nor a sound, except the loud ticking of the kitchen clock, I sit down to write to you without fear of being disturbed, for this, my dear Maddie, is going to be an important epistle. I am sincerely glad to hear that you are so happy; that your father shows that he has affection for you; that you and he are no longer strangers, but getting on together capitally. I hope his tenderness will be able to survive the news you have to tell him, and must tell him soon—the fact, in short, that you are

married. I can quite understand how you are dreading the evil moment, and can fully enter into your feelings of shrinking reluctance to dispel this beautiful new life, this kind of enchanted existence, by just one magic word, and that word to be uttered by your own lips. But if you are adverse to mentioning this one word—which must be spoken, sooner or later—let me take the commission on myself. I will speak to your father. I will bear the full blast and fury of his indignation and disappointment. After all, we have nothing to be ashamed of. If I had known that you were the heiress of a millionaire, I would never have ventured to marry you—of that you may be sure. But, under other circumstances, it was different. In the days when you had neither father nor home, I offered you my home, such as it was. There was no disparity between our two walks in life, nothing to indicate the barrier which has subsequently arisen between us.

"Maddie, we have come to the cross-roads. You will have to choose one way or the other. You will have to choose between your father and me—between riches and poverty. If your father will not listen to the idea of your having changed your name, you must let me testify to the fact; and if he shuts his doors on you afterward, you are no worse off than a year ago If I thought you would ever again have such a terrible struggle to live as you experienced last winter, I would not be so barbarous, so cruel, as to ask you to leave your present luxurious home. But things

look brighter. I am, thank God, restored to health. I have a prospect of earning a livelihood; our dark days are, I trust, a thing of the past. I am resolved to set to work next week. I cannot endure the idea of living in idleness on your father's money; for although the whole of our stay here has cost less than you say he has recently given for a dog; still it *is* his money all the same—money for your education, money diverted from its original use, money expended on a fraud. Of late I have not touched it, having another resource. I only wish I could replace every halfpenny. Let us have an end of this secrecy and double-dealing. And now that we have once more got a foothold on life, and the means of existence, I believe I shall be able to scramble up the ladder! Who knows but you may be a judge's wife yet! I wish I could give you even a tithe of the luxuries with which you are now surrounded. I would pawn years of my future to do it. But if I cannot endow you with diamonds and carriages, I can give you what money cannot buy, Maddie, an undivided heart, that loves you with every pulse of its existence.

"Now I have said my say. I only await a line from you to go at once to town, and lay bare our secret to your father. It is the right thing to do; it is, indeed. You cannot continue to live this double life—and your real home is with your husband and child. It is now three months and more since you drove away down the lane with Farmer Holt—three long, long months to me,

Maddie. You have had ample time to make an inroad on your father's affections. You can do a great deal in that way in less than three months. If he is what you say, he will not be implacable. You are his only child. You tell me that he thinks so much of good blood and birth—at least in this respect the Wynnes should please him. He will find out all about us in Burke. We were barons of the twelfth century; and there is a dormant title in the family. The candle is just out, and I must say good-by. But I could go on writing to you for another hour. The text of my discourse, if not sufficiently plain already, is, let me tell your father of our marriage. One line will bring me to town at once.

"I am, your loving husband,

"LAURENCE WYNNE."

"Do not think that I am complaining that you have not been down here. I fully understand that your father, having no occupation, is much at home, perhaps *too* much at home, and can't bear you out of his sight—which is natural, and that to come and go to the Holt Farm would take four hours—hours for which you would be called on to account. And you dared not venture—dared not deceive him. Deceive him no longer in *any way*, Maddie. Send me a wire, and he shall know all before to-morrow night."

Madeline read this letter over slowly, with rapidly changing color. Some sentences she perused two or three times, and when she came

to the last word, she recommenced at the beginning—then she folded it up, put it into its envelope, thrust it into her dressing-case, and turned the key.

She was a good deal disturbed; you could read that by her face, as she went and stood in the window, playing with the charms on her bangle. She had a color in her cheeks and a frown upon her brow.

How impatient Laurence was! Why would he not give her time? What was three months to prepare papa? And was it *really* three months? It seemed more like three weeks. Yes, April; and this was the beginning of July.

Her eyes slowly traveled round the luxurious apartment, with its pale blue silk hangings, inlaid satin-wood furniture, and Persian carpet, her toilet-table loaded with silver bottles and boxes, a large silver framed mirror, draped in real lace, the silver-backed brushes, the cases of perfume; and she thought with a shudder of the poor little room at No. 2, with its rickety table, shilling glass, and jug without a handle. Deliberately, she stood before the dressing-table, and deliberately studied her reflection in the costly mirror. How different she looked to poor, haggard, shabby Mrs. Wynne, the slave of a sick husband and a screaming baby, with all the cares of a miserable home upon her young shoulders; with no money in her purse, no hope in her heart, no future, and no friends!

Here she beheld Miss West, radiant with health and beauty, her abundant hair charm-

ingly arranged by the deft-fingered Josephine, her pretty, slim figure shown off by a simply made but artistic twenty-guinea gown; her little watch was set in brilliants, her fingers were glittering with the same. She had just risen from a dainty lunch, where she was served by two powdered footmen and the clerical butler. Her carriage is even now waiting at the door, through the open window she can hear the impatient stamping of her six-hundred-guinea horses.

She was about to call for an earl's daughter, who was to chaperone her to a *fête*, where, from previous experience, she knew that many and many a head would be turned to look after pretty Miss West; and she liked to be admired! She had never gauged her own capacity for pleasure until the last few months. And Laurence required her to give up all this, to rend the veil from her secret, and stand before the world once more, shabby, faded, insignificant Mrs. Wynne, the wife of a briefless barrister!

Of course she was devoted to Laurence. "Oh," angrily to her own conscience, "do not think that I can ever change to him! But the hideous contrast between that life and this! He must give me a little more time—he must, he must! I *must* enjoy myself a little!" she reiterated passionately to her beautiful reflection. "Once papa knows, I shall be thrust out to beggary. I know I shall; and I shall never have a carriage or a French gown again."

And this was the girl who, four months previously, had pawned her clothes for her hus-

band's necessaries, and walked miles to save twopence!

Sudden riches are a terrible test—a severe trial of moral fiber, especially when they raise a girl of nineteen, with inherited luxurious tastes, from poverty, touching starvation, to be mistress of unbounded wealth, the daughter, only child and heiress of an open-handed Crœsus, with thousands as plentiful now as coppers once had been.

"I will go down and see him. I must risk it; there is no other plan," she murmured, as she rang her bell preparatory to putting herself in the hands of her maid. "Letters are so stupid. I will seize the first chance I can find, and steal down to the Holts, if it is but for half an hour, and tell Laurence that he *must* wait; he must be patient."

And so he was—pathetically patient, as morning after morning he waited in the road and waylaid the postman, who seldom had occasion to come up to the farm; and still there was no letter.

Madeline was daily intending to rush down, and day followed day without her finding the opportunity or the courage to carry out her purpose. And still Laurence waited; and then he began to fear that she must be ill. A whole week and no letter! He would go to town and inquire. No sooner thought of than done. Fear and keen anxiety now took the place of any other sensation, and hurriedly making a change in his clothes, and leaving a message for Mrs. Holt, he set off to the station—three miles—on foot, and

took a third-class return to London. Once there, he made his way—and a long way it was—to the fashionable quarter of Belgrave Square. It was a sultry July afternoon, the very pavement was hot, the air oppressive, people were beginning to talk of Cowes and Scotland.

Nevertheless, many gay equipages were dashing about, containing society notabilities and bright parasols. One of these swept round a corner just as Laurence was about to cross the street; he had only a fleeting glimpse as it passed by. A landau and pair of bay steppers, with what is called "extravagant" action, powdered servants, two ladies in light summer dresses, and a young man, with a button-hole and lavender gloves, on the back seat.

One of the ladies had a faint resemblance to Madeline, as well as could be gathered from an impression of bright dark eyes, shaded by a French picture-hat and a chiffon sunshade. No, it could not be her. This was some patrician beauty, who looked as if she had been accustomed to such an equipage from the days of her perambulator.

It was merely a passing idea, and quickly brushed aside by Laurence as he once more walked on rapidly. At length he approached the house—he was at the same side of the square—within four numbers now. His heart beat rather quickly as he glanced up. No; none of the upper blinds were pulled down, he observed with relief, and then he took in the dimensions of this palatial mansion, with a porch and pil-

lars, conservatory, billiard-room, and buildings built out, and built on, wherever they could be crammed. The awnings were out—gay red and white striped ones—banks of flowers bloomed in the balconies. Oh, what a contrast to Solferino Place! Would not Madeline see it too? he asked himself, with a pang. After a moment's hesitation he rang the bell, and almost instantly the door was opened by a tall, supercilious-looking footman.

"Is—is—Miss—West at home?" stammered her husband.

"Not at home," replied the servant, in a parrot voice, holding out his hand for the card that he presumed would be forthcoming.

"Is she quite well?" ventured the visitor.

"Quite well, sir, thank you," having studied the questioner, and come to the conclusion that he was not one of your nobodies, like his worthy master, "Who shall I say?" he asked confidentially.

"It is of no consequence. I have fogotten my cards. I will call again," turning as he spoke and slowly descending the steps.

This was a most rum go in Jeames's opinion. He might, at least, have left his name! But no. Jeames stood gazing after him, with what is called "the door in his hand," for two whole minutes, glanced sleepily around the big, white-hot-looking square, and then went in to study the paper and the latest betting on Goodwood.

Laurence made his way to Mr. Jessop's chambers, in—oh, extravagance!—a hansom, and

found that gentleman extremely busy, and, as he expressed it, "up to his ears." He, however, knocked off for the time being, in order to have a smoke and a chat with his friend, whom he declared that he found looking as fit as a fiddle, and requested to know when he was going to put his shoulder to the wheel again?

"Lots for you to do, my boy. Martin has married an heiress and cut the concern. My sister has married the son of old Baggs, of the great firm of Baggs & Keepe, solicitors. My fortune is made, and so is yours!"

"I'm glad to hear it."

"And, by Jove, old chap! those articles of yours, in the 'Pepper and Salt Magazine,' have taken the whole baking—are regular scorchers; lots of people are talking of them, and asking if they are by the same Laurence Wynne, of the Inner Temple—fellow with a beard? Who would have thought of your breaking out in that line, eh? as ready with your pen as your tongue."

"Readier."

"And look here, Larry, there is that case of Cox *v.* Fox coming on, and you can have a finger in the pie if you like."

Larry did not clutch at this lucrative opening; he puffed away moodily at a cigarette, and stared out of the window in rather an abstracted fashion.

His keen-eyed friend noted this, and said, in a totally different key:

"And what about Mrs. Wynne?"

His companion looked at him quickly, colored

faintly, threw his cigarette out of the window, and said nothing.

"She has not told the old gentleman yet?"

"No, not yet."

"So I surmised, as they say in America. I saw her at the opera last night, the cynosure of all eyes, and her proud and happy father noting that half the glasses in the house were fixed on Miss West. Ahem! How long is it to go on, this little comedy? Eh?"

"I can't tell you!" impatiently. "Not another hour as far as I am concerned. I don't wish her to sail under false colors any longer. I came up to see her to-day."

"The deuce you did!" in blunt amazement.

"But she was out."

"I suppose you saw the house and the style. By Jove! it's like royalty. I dined there last week."

"*You* did?" in unfeigned astonishment.

"Yes, your most humble servant. I've met Mr. West at my club; he knows a friend of mine —an impecunious lord—that is all. The dinner was a banquet, a feast fit for Lucullus himself. I had the honor of being presented to Miss West."

"Indeed!"

"Of course I had never seen her before," winking at his friend. "And, upon my word, I declare I scarcely recognized her! Dress, diamonds, and manner—manner begotten of importance, appreciation, wealth, and luxurious surroundings. Not that Mrs. Wynne's manners

were not always those of a gentlewoman, but there is a difference between doing the honors of a couple of herrings and a sheep's head, in one living room, and being the hostess presiding over a French dinner—with perfect appointments and exotic flowers—entertaining lords and ladies and bishops—eh?—and doing it well, too. But wherever she got her good blood, Laurence, it did not come from her father's side of the house. I sometimes felt inclined to run my fork into him, or to shy a wine-glass at his head. He is so blatantly proud of Robert West, his success, his money, his grand acquaintances, and, above *all*, his daughter. Excuse me, he is a thundering little bounder!"

"You think he will be furious when he knows that he has a son-in-law?" said Laurence, gravely.

"If you were a lord—or even a baronet—and had some sort of handle to your name—"

"But as I have nothing—not even Q.C.?"

"I think, from what I know of him, that he will be unpleasant, my dear Larry—very unpleasant."

"And the first shape that his unpleasantness will take will be to turn Madeline out of doors?"

"Yes, I should say so—I think the odds are fifty to one."

"Well, she has her own home, at any rate. I shall set to work on Monday. I'll go round and see about my old chambers. You can send me those papers, and tell Tom, the clerk, that I am coming back for good. I shall take lodgings as

soon as I have looked round—in a more airy locality than Solferino Place. Mrs. Holt will keep the child till we are settled."

"You—er—mean—you and Mrs. Wynne?" looking curiously at his companion.

"Well, yes; who else should I mean?"

"Does she say anything about returning?"

"No-o," staring confusedly; "but it is understood."

Here ensued a short silence, during which Mr. Jessop was nerving himself to speak his mind to his friend—to speak for that friend's good—a thankless task, but he assured himself that it was his *duty*.

"Larry, old chap, you and I have been pals since we were in jackets at Harrow, and I've been your ally ever since the day you licked Thompson, major, for pitching into me. We've always stuck together somehow ever since. I think a great deal about your concerns. What hurts you hurts me."

"Out with it," cried the other, bruskly. "Out with it. I know you are going to say something disagreeable. That will do for the overture."

"I must say one word to prepare you, old man," suddenly standing up, laying his hand on his companion's shoulder, and looking down into his face. "It is a fatal mistake to expect too much in life—to be too sanguine! Don't—don't be too sure that she *wants* to come back."

CHAPTER XVI

TWO VISITS AND A LETTER

Miss West returned from her drive. She had been to Lord's to see the Oxford and Cambridge cricket match. She had been surrounded by admirers, like flies round a pot of honey, and had the most eligible *partis* of the season endeavoring to win their way to her good graces as she promenaded up and down between the innings, and partook of tea and strawberries in the tents; and Lady Rachel (who had her own diversions) looked on and said to herself, "That Madeline was becoming much too run after, and Tony would have to mind what he was about." Meanwhile, Mr. West, for whose society there was no competition, hugged himself with joy, as he saw a baronet and a baron approach Madeline in turn. This was precisely as it should be! Then he went up to Lord Tony and said, "I say, Tony, wasn't that the Duke of Margate I saw you talking to just now—a funny old Johnny, with a shabby hat and red face?"

"Ye-e-s—I—I believe so," shrinking instinctively from what he knew was to follow—as per usual.

"Then just, when you get a nice little opening, introduce *me*, there's a good fellow. Watch him when he comes out of the long tent; he is having tea with the FitzMorse Montagues. I'll do as much for you another time."

Lord Tony dreaded these demands. He even went so far as to hide from Mr. West, or to absent himself altogether from gatherings where they were likely to meet. He had introduced his sister to the Wests. He liked Madeline immensely. His aunt, Lady Clapperclaw, had called, and Miss West had got cards from a few good houses, but he really drew the line at presenting "the old squatter," as Mr. West was nicknamed by all his acquaintances. People did not *like* it. They glared fiercely when this dapper, well-dressed, white-spatted, white-hatted little person was introduced to them—a man who bowed and talked, and talked and grinned, exactly like a toy monkey! Confound Tony Foster, who the deuce was this infernal little cad? What was Tony about? He was always mixed up with a second-rate set, but why thrust his shoddy friends on *them?* However, when it came to be hinted that the "squatter" was rolling in money, and dying to spend it—literally panting to give entertainments of the costliest description—a second Monte Cristo, with a spirit of unbounded generosity and one lovely daughter—matters took a different complexion. Mr. West was elected to a couple of good clubs, some visiting-cards and invitations were left on Mr. and Miss West by footmen who had descended

from coroneted landaus. Ladies with slim, smiling, scapegrace sons called on the heiress. Fast young married women, who looked forward to dances and all manner of festivities, called (and made their friends leave cards). Young men who had seen and admired Miss West got introduced, and dropped in on Sundays. Lord Moneycute, an elderly baron, who had long been looking for a wife with money, also Sir Crete Levanter, called—and they subsequently dined—frequently at 365. Many people whom the ignorant colonial thought smart, grand, and distinguished, called; but it was not all gold that glittered; there was a great deal of brass about some of these visitors! On the other hand, pretty mammas, with daughters who were in the best set, set their faces against these parvenus. Mammas with rich and titled sons were equally stand-off. One or two great ladies, who had been introduced, as it were, accidentally to Miss West, cut her at once.

But the Wests were as yet ignorant of the lights and shades of London society, and they were both—Mr. West especially—perfectly satisfied that, though not in the Marlborough House set, they were close upon its borders.

. . . . . .

"A gentleman had called to see her," murmured Miss West, languidly, as she drew off her gloves on the threshold of the morning-room. "Did he leave his card?"

"No, ma'am, he did not; he said he had forgotten it."

"And he asked for me—not for Mr. West?" she continued indifferently, glancing at her parent, who was rapidly turning over a pile of notes, and picking out those emblazoned with a coronet.

"I'll tell you who it was," he broke in; "it was Lord Maltravers. He came about that macaw he promised you."

"No, sir," put in Jeames, firmly but respectfully; "it was no gentleman I ever saw before—certainly not Lord Maltravers—though he might have been a lord for all I know to the contrary."

"It wasn't a tradesman?"

"Oh, no, sir!" most emphatically.

"What was he like?" inquired Madeline, opening a letter very deliberately as she spoke, her thoughts very far away from Laurence.

"Well, ma'am, he looked quite the gentleman. He was tall, about my 'ight" (complacently), "very dark eyes, a short beard—what you'd consider a 'andsome young man. He carried a queer-looking stick with a ivory top, and he seemed disappointed as you were not at home."

"A queer-looking cane with an ivory top, and he seemed disappointed!" The letter fluttered out of Madeline's hands, and fell to the ground, as the unconsious Jeames thus blandly announced that the visitor had been her husband! She was glad to stoop quickly, and thus hide her face, with its sudden increase of color. Laurence had come up to see her! What rashness! What madness!

"Well!" exclaimed her father, looking at her

sharply, "have you made out your mysterious visitor, eh?—eh?—eh?"

"I think he must have been the brother of one of my schoolfellows from the description," she said, with wonderful composure, tearing open another letter as she spoke.

"Humph!" grunted Mr. West, in a tone that showed that schoolfellows' brothers were not at all in his line.

"Here is an invitation to Lord Carbuncle's for Thursday week," said his daughter, dexterously turning the current of his thoughts into a much less dangerous channel, and holding out the note for his perusal.

"Thursday week. Let's see; what is there for Thursday week, eh?"

"We dine with the Thompson-Thompsons in Portland Place."

"Oh, dear me, yes, so we do," querulously. "What a confounded nuisance!" in a tone of intense exasperation. "Can't we throw them over?"

But his daughter gave him no encouragement, knowing full well the enormity of throwing people over when a better engagement presented itself, and that such proceedings were not countenanced by good society in Vanity Fair.

So Mr. West (who was cheered by another coroneted invitation-card) was fain to submit with what grace he could muster.

. . . . . .

The next morning Miss West resolved upon a bold step. She pleaded a headache as an excuse

from attending Sandown, and as soon as she had seen her parent safely off the premises, she hurried upstairs, dressed herself very plainly, put a black veil in her pocket—also a well-filled purse—and, walking to a short distance, took a hansom for Waterloo Station. This time she traveled first class, of course, and hired a fly to take her to the farm—at least, to the lane leading to the farm—and there to wait, in case Mr. Holt was unable to drive her back. She desired to give every one an agreeable surprise.

Mrs. Holt, who was in the kitchen shelling peas into a yellow bowl, gave a little scream when she beheld Mrs. Wynne standing on the threshold, between her and the sunshine, and, upsetting half the pods, rushed at her hospitably, wiping her hands on her apron, and assuring her that "she was more welcome than the flowers in May. Baby was well, and growing a rare size, but Mr. Wynne was out; he and the farmer had gone away together just after breakfast, and would not be back till late, and did ever anything happen so contrary?"

Her square brow knit into lines of disappointment when the young lady, in answer to her eager queries, informed her that she was not come to stay—that, in fact, she was going to Ireland in two or three days with her father and a party of friends. He had taken the shooting of a large estate in the south, and was most anxious to inspect it.

"Ay, dearie, dearie me!" said Mrs. Holt, after an eloquent pause, "and what *will* Mr. Wynne

say to that? I'm thinking he will not be for letting you go," and she shook her head dubiously.

This was precisely the subject that Madeline had come to discuss with him, and he was away for the day. How excessively provoking and tiresome!

Mrs. Kane had been won over with money, Mrs. Harper with valuable presents, and the hint of an invitation to stay at Belgrave Square. There remained but Laurence to deal with. He really must learn to be patient—to wait for the auspicious moment when, having gained the whole of her father's confidence and affection, he began to realize that she was so absolutely necessary to his happiness and to his social success that he could never spare her. Then, and not till then, would she throw herself into his arms and confess to him that she was married to Laurence Wynne. Laurence and the baby would be brought to Belgrave Square in triumph, and share her lot in basking in the sun of wealth and luxury. This was Mrs. Wynne's nice little programme, and ten times a day she repeated to herself this formula—"Laurence must wait."

She kissed her little boy, and praised his rosy cheeks, and asked many questions about her husband, and was so surprised to hear that he wrote for hours and hours; but Mrs. Holt remarked that she took no interest now in the chickens, calves, or dogs—or, what she once found irresistible, the dairy!

Also Mrs. Holt's quick woman's eye did not

fail to notice her blazing rings when she pulled off her gloves, her valuable little wristlet-watch, which she consulted nervously from time to time, her plain but expensive dress, that rustled when she moved. Ah! she could see—although she tried not to show it—that Mrs. Wynne had changed. Her mind was possessed now by riches, and he, poor young man, would never be able to keep her contented, now she had had the taste of money, and knew what it was to be a great lady; and Mrs. Holt shook her head wistfully, as she made a red-currant tart. Meanwhile Madeline carried baby down to the gate and looked out for Laurence, but no Laurence came, and baby was surprisingly heavy. Then she went round the garden. Oh, how small it looked somehow, and there was horrid green weed on the pool! Then she made her way into their sitting-room, with its old glass book-case, brass-faced clock, samplers hanging on the walls, and plain red tiles underfoot. A dainty summer breeze was playing with the white curtains through the open lattice, and the great hollyhocks and sunflowers were rearing their heads and endeavoring to peep in from the garden. There was Laurence's pipe; there, in a corner, stood the stick which had betrayed him; and there was his writing, just as he had left it—ruled sermon paper. No, not a letter! What was it all about? And she took it up and glanced over it. It was some rubbish, headed, "Middle-aged Matrons." How absurd!

Then, on the spur of the moment, she called

in Mrs. Holt, and consigned Master Harry to her motherly arms, while she sat down to indite a letter to Laurence, with his own favorite pen and at his own table.

"DEAR LAURENCE" (she said)—"I came down on purpose to see you, and am so dreadfully disappointed to find you are out, for I dare not wait, and I had so much to say to you. I am delighted to find baby so grown, and to hear such good accounts of yourself. I believe you were at Belgrave Square yesterday. Laurence, how could you be so rash? Fortunately, no one suspected who you were, or that you were anything to Miss West. I feel quite another person than Miss West now that I am down in the country, and looking out of the window in front of me into this dear old garden and the faraway wooded hills.

"I feel as if money was nothing in comparison to youth and domesticity and peace, and that I could be happy here forever with you; but I know that, once back in my own boudoir this very self-same evening, I shall change my mind again, and look upon rustic life as intolerable—a living death, a being buried alive without a fashionable funeral. Money and money's worth I must attain; love I have. I wish to command both—love and money. We know what love is without money, don't we? I shall never, never change to you, Laurence, you may rely on that.

"I received your last letter safely, and have laid to heart all you say; but, dear, dear Laur-

ence, you must let me take my own time with papa. I will tell him sooner or later; but, indeed, I am the best judge of how and when and where. You used to say I was foreseeing and prudent and wise, in the days of No. 2. Surely I am not changed in three months' time! Leave it all to me. He will come round yet, and, like the good people in the fairy-tales, we shall live happy ever after. On Sunday night we all go to Ireland by the mail from Euston. It is quite a sudden idea. Papa has given up the idea of the Scotch moors, and was talked into taking this shooting and deer-forest and castle by an agreeable Irish nobleman he met at his club. There is every inducement to sportsmen, from red deer to black cock, as well as three thousand acres of ground and a castle.

"We are to have a succession of visitors. I hope to do great things in three months, and will write to you ever week and report progress.

"Ever, dear Laurence, your loving wife,

"M. W."

His loving wife put this effusion into an envelope, directed it, and placed it on the mantelpiece, where it would be sure to catch his eye, and then she felt considerably relieved in heart and mind, and had tea in the kitchen with Mrs. Holt, turning the cakes and praising the butter, and softening Mrs. Holt's feelings the longer she stayed in her company. Then she had a confidential chat about baby and his clothes, and placed twenty pounds in her listener's hand for

his wardrobe, in spite of that good woman's protestation that it was just five times too much. She also made the farmer's wife a substantial present of money, telling her very prettily, with tears in her eyes, that it was not in return for her kindness, for no sum could repay *that*, but as a small token of gratitude.

By various means she reinstated herself in Mrs. Holt's good graces, and having hugged the baby and kissed him over and over again, and taken a hearty leave of her hostess, she set off briskly on foot to where the patient fly awaited her. She paused at the end of the lane, and looked back on the Holt farm. It was a homely, sequestered spot, buried in fields and trees, and very peaceful; but it looked somehow more insignificant — shabbier than she had fancied. How small the windows were! How close it stood to the big yard, with its swarming poultry and calves and dirty duck-pond! And what horrible knives and spoons Mrs. Holt used, and what fearful shoes she wore! However, she was a good old soul, and had taken great care of baby. Then she once more turned her back on the farm, and set her face toward her father's luxurious mansion. Luckily for herself, she was home before him—was dressed, and sitting half buried in a chair, engrossed in a novel, when he returned in high good humor. He had been winning and losing in the best of company, and was very eloquent about a certain Roman prince who had been uncommonly pleasant, and had said he "would like to be presented to you, Made-

line!" His little hard head was so full of this new acquaintance that he had not room for a thought as to where or how his daughter had spent the day. Indeed, from all evidence to the contrary, she might never have been out of the house.

Laurence found Madeline's letter staring at him from the mantel-piece when he came home. He snatched it eagerly, and devoured it then and there, and as he came to the last line his sensations were those of exceedingly bitter disappointment—yes, and something more, he was hurt. It seemed to him that through the epistle ran an undercurrent of jaunty indifference, and this cut him to the quick.

And she was going to Ireland for three months! Well, at any rate he would see her off; a railway station was open to the public. She need not necessarily see him; but he would see her. The next day he carried out his intention, traveling up to town early in the morning, visiting his chambers, dining with his friend Jessop, and being in good time to speed the Irish mail at Euston. He watched and waited, and saw many parties approach; but yet not his particular party. They did not appear until within five minutes of the departure of the train.

And what a fuss they made! More than all their predecessors put together. There was one footman running for tickets, another being carried madly along the platform in tow of two powerful setters, one retainer had the booking of the luggage, another was arranging the interior

of their Pullman sleeping-car, and then the party came up to it, and Laurence beheld his father-in-law for the first time—a neat, trim, bustling little man, talking vociferously and gesticulating about Lady Rachel's luggage. There was a very well-dressed, dark little woman, not young, but juvenile in air and style, who laughed and talked incessantly to a big man in a tweed suit, and looked at Mr. West with contemptuous grimaces, and shrugged her shapely shoulders. There was a "lout" in wonderful knickerbockers—so he mentally ticketed Lord Tony. There was a tall girl in a sort of long racing-coat. There were two lady's-maids; and last, but not least, there was Madeline—Madeline so altered that he could scarcely believe his eyes—Madeline in a regal traveling-cloak, carrying a Chinese lap-dog, giving directions to hurrying footmen and maids, and dispensing smiling adieux among a group of young men who had come to see them off—meaning Miss West. This was surely not his Madeline—the little schoolgirl he had married, the devoted, struggling, hard-working wife and mother, late of 2, Solferino Place. He stood back for a moment in the shadow of the book-stall, and realized for the first time the immense gulf that divided him from Mr. West's heiress—the great yawning chasm which lay between him and Madeline. What would fill it—what? He could think of no bridge but money.

Very poignant were his thoughts as he stood thus—poor, aloof, and alone, while his radiant

wife made her beaming farewells from the window of the Pullman car.

"She should say good-by to him too," he declared to himself, with sudden fierce resolve, and, stepping forward, he stood out in the full light, a little apart from the gay group who were now removing their hats with a real or simulated air of regret as the great long train, that was to carry the popular heiress westward, began slowly to move. Madeline smiled and nodded and waved her hand. But who was that standing a little aside, further down the platform? It was Laurence—Laurence, whom she had not beheld for three months. It gave her quite a shock to see him—but a pleasant shock, that sent the blood tingling through her veins.

How well he looked!—quite himself again; and how well he contrasted with these gilded youths whom she had just (she hoped) seen the last of! She would have blown him a kiss had she dared; but her father's little beady eyes were upon her, and she could only sit and look—she might not even bow! Then, with sudden compunction, and justly alarmed by the expression on his face, she leaned quickly out of the window and nodded and smiled.

The other young men accepted this final signal with demonstrations of rapture. Little did they guess that it was not for them, but for that quiet, gentlemanly-looking fellow a few yards to their left. If they were not aware of this, he was.

"Who is that man on the platform," said

Lady Rachel, "that looks as if he was seeing us off, too? There is no one else in the car but ourselves."

"Oh, I'm sure I don't know," responded Mr. West. "There are heaps of people going over, though I dare say he belongs to the Ravenstayle party. Lord Ravenstayle is in the train. It would not surprise me if it were his nephew, Cosmo Woodwing—aristocratic-looking sort of chap—and took a good stare at you, eh, Maddie?" facetiously. "Will know you again next time he sees you?"—highly delighted at his own conceit. "I suppose you have no idea who he is, eh?"

Madeline had an excellent idea of who he was, but this was no time to confide her secret to her parent—better to save this little domestic bomb for a more discreet opportunity.

Madeline had a shrewd idea that the mysterious gentleman who had taken a good long look at her—the presumable Lord Cosmo Woodwing—was her own husband!

CHAPTER XVII

GONE TO IRELAND

LAURENCE WYNNE stood upon the platform and watched the Irish mail—"The Wild Irishman"—wind its great long body slowly out of the station—watched till the red light, like a fiery eye, became smaller and smaller, and disappeared from view. Then he hurried off to Waterloo to catch his own train—which he missed—and, going by the next, walked from Guildford, a distance of twelve miles, arriving home at one o'clock in the morning, to the intense relief of Mrs. Holt, who had been sitting up for him in a nightcap of portentous dimensions, and who, seeing that he looked tired and dusty, and what she mentally termed "down," was disposed to be a very mother to him, even to setting a cold supper before him at that unparalleled and improper hour, and staying him with a flagon of her own home-brewed ale—a sure token of favor.

"And so she's gone!" she exclaimed at last, when she could absolutely contain herself no longer. "Actually gone to Ireland."

"Yes, Mrs. Holt, she is gone," acquiesced her lodger, coolly.

"And goodness knows when she will come back," she continued indignantly. "Dear, dear, dear! I wonder what *my* master would say if I'd a done the like—just walking off and leaving him and an infant to fend for themselves; but I suppose fine folk is different, and don't mind?" giving her cap-frills a mighty toss.

Laurence said nothing. He was not going to tell this worthy and virtuously irate matron that he did mind very much. No matter how he felt himself, he would have every one else think well of Maddie. He would hardly admit to his own heart that she was not *quite* perfect, that he was beginning to feel sorely jealous of her father, her fine surroundings, and her fashionable friends. However, there was no use in thinking; what he had to do was to work, and endeavor to win for himself name, fame, and fortune.

The next morning he set himself to make a real beginning. He packed up his slender belongings, he took his last walk round the fields and garden with Farmer Holt, he consigned his son to the care of his kind hostess for the present, and, promising to run down often and look them up, he, in his turn, was taken to the station by the chestnut colt, and departed to make a fresh start in life, while the burly farmer stood on the platform and flourished his adieux with a red-spotted handkerchief. Then, returning slowly home, agreed with the missus in finding

the place "summat lonely-like now," in missing their late inmate, and in praising him up to the skies. Mrs. Holt was inclined to improve the occasion by drawing invidious comparisons between Mr. Wynne and his wife. "She was not like him—he had more true worth in his little finger than she had in the whole of her body," etc.

But the worthy master, who had not been blind to Madeline's pretty face and fascinating smiles, would not listen for a moment to such treason, and told his better half, rather sharply, to "hold her tongue!"

Laurence Wynne took up his quarters in the Temple temporarily—in a set of gloomy old chambers, with small narrow windows and small panes, looking out on nothing in particular—at any rate he had no view to distract his attention from his work, and of work he had plenty.

His friend Jessop (unlike some so-called friends), having got a good start up the ladder of law, reached back a hand to his struggling schoolfellow; and an opening—a good opening—was all that his struggling schoolfellow required. His brains, his ceaseless industry, his good address, and his handsome appearance did the rest. He was far cleverer than his friend Jessop, and had twice his perseverance and talent for steady application. Jessop could keep a bar dinner in a roar of laughter, but Wynne could hold, as it were, in his hand, the eyes and ears of a jury. He had a natural gift for oratory; he had a clear, sonorous voice; he was never at a loss for

a word—the right word; never said too much, or too little; never lost an opportunity of making a point, or of driving home an argument. In short, among the juniors he was a pearl of price. His brilliant articles of biting satire, which were read by every one, had brought his name up, and his name had been speedily followed by his appearance in person—his appearance in a successful case. In short, a tide in his affairs had come, and he had taken it at the flood, and the little skiff "success" was sailing over the waves in gallant style.

He had been most fortunate in one or two minor cases; he could not afford to be careless, like great men who had made their reputations. He began to be spoken of as a very rising junior, and to be consulted on crochety points of law, to be listened to whenever he opened his lips, to be asked out to many professional dinners, and to receive—oh, joy!—not a few briefs on which the name of Laurence Wynne was inscribed in a round, legal hand.

Yes, he was getting on rapidly. He could now afford to pay well for the maintenance of Master Wynne, to make handsome presents to the Holts, to allow himself new clothes and books, and the luxury of belonging to a good club.

And what about Mrs. Wynne all this time?

Madeline was rather agitated by so unexpectedly beholding her husband on the platform the night they left for Ireland. Her heart beat fast, and her eyes were rather dim as they lost sight of his figure in the crowd.

"Poor Laurence! How fond he was of her," she said to herself, with a sharp pang of compunction. "Fancy his coming up all that way, for just *one* glimpse, one little look across the crowd!" But, latterly, Madeline West had been so overwhelmed with attention that she now took many things as a matter of course, and but a proper tribute to her own importance.

She and Lady Rachel occupied the same sleeping compartment, and her ladyship, who was an old and experienced traveler, wasted no time in gazing dreamily out of the window like Madeline, but took off her hat and dress and lay down in her berth, and was soon asleep, while the other sat with her eyes fixed on the dusky country through which they were passing, asking herself many disturbing questions, and fighting out a battle in her own breast between Laurence and luxury. At times she had almost resolved to tell her father all within the next twelve hours, and to accept the consequences, whatever they might be. She was wrong to deceive him; she was wrong to leave Laurence and the child. Yes; she would do the right thing at last—confess and go back.

With this decision laboriously arrived at, her mind was more at ease—a load seemed lifted from her brain; and she laid her head on her pillow at last and fell asleep.

But morning brings counsel—we do not say that it always brings wisdom. In the cool, very cool dawn, as she sat on the deck of the "Ireland" and watched the sun rise and the shores

of Erin rise into view, her courage ebbed away; and as she partook of a cup of hot coffee at Kingsbridge Station, and encountered her father, who was exceedingly short in his temper, owing to a bad night's rest, her good intentions melted as snow before the sun. No, no, she told herself; she must wait until her parent was in a more genial, indulgent mood. To speak now would be fatal, even supposing there was an opportunity for a few moments *tête-à-tête.*

The party traveled down at express speed to Mallow Junction, and from there a short rail journey brought them near their destination. It was four o'clock on a superb August afternoon as they drove up to Clane Castle. The owner and agent had not misled the new tenants; it *was* a castle, a fine commanding structure tucked under the wing of a great purple mountain, and was approached by an avenue that wound for a full Irish mile through a delightful demesne. What oaks! what beeches! what green glades and scuttling rabbits! what cover for woodcock! and, outlined against the sky-line on the mountain, was that a deer?

The exclamations of pleasure and astonishment from his daughter and his guests made Mr. West's tongue wag freely.

"Yes; it's a fine place. I said, 'None of your picnic shanties for me.' I said, 'I must have a decent house and a fair head of game—money no object,' " he explained volubly, as he strutted before the party into a noble dining-room, where a very recherche meal awaited them.

The travelers, fortified by an excellent repast, and filled with an agreeable sense of well-being, repaired to their several chambers to get rid of their dusty garments, and met once more in the library, and sallied forth to see the place, Mr. West acting as guide and circerone, and conducting his followers as if he had been born on the premises. The eyes of appreciative sportsmen sparkled as they took in the miles of mountain, the forests, the extent of heather, stretching widely to the horizon, and felt more than ever that little West, by Jove! knew what he was about when he asked a fellow to shoot, and did you right well.

Besides the far-reaching mountains, there were other attractions—a lake and boathouse, a fine garden and pleasure-ground, a tennis-court, and —oh, joy!—a capital billiard-table. Every one expressed their delight with the castle, the scenery, the weather, and soon settled down to enjoy themselves in their several ways.

The twelfth of August produced a splendid bag of grouse, surpassing even the head-keeper's fondest prediction. Every one of the neighboring "quality" called of their own free will. There were celebrated tennis-parties, and dinners at the Castle (Mr. West had brought his own cook), and the fame of the excellent shooting went far and near. Mr. West was jubilant; he felt a grand seigneur. Never had he been a personage of such importance, and he actually began to look down on his London acquaintances.

"The shooting is A1—every one knows that," he said. "Courtenay wants to know *how* I like the place?—a deuce deal better than I like him; and Dafford writes to ask if I can give him a day or two? I'm not very hot on Dafford. He wasn't over and above civil, and he never got his sister, Lady Dovetail, to call; but he'd like to make use of me now. If I'm not good enough for him in London, he isn't good enough for me here. Oh, no, Mr. Dafford; you don't come to Clane Castle!" And putting his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, Mr. West trotted up and down his daughter's morning-room exuberantly happy.

Madeline was happy, too, but from other causes. The lovely scenery, the free yet luxurious life, the entire novelty of her surroundings, the impulsive, gay-spirited gentry, the finest peasantry in the world, with their soft brogue, wit, blarney, and dark eyes, all enchanted her. The only little clouds upon her sky were a spirit of discontent among her English retinue, and a certain indefinable coolness and constraint in Laurence's weekly letter.

CHAPTER XVIII

WANTED — A REASON

THE guests at the castle were, as notified in a local paper, Lady Rachel Jenkins and Mr. Jenkins, the Honorable Mrs. Leach, Lord Anthony Foster, Miss Pamela Pace, Miss Peggy Lumley,

Captain Vansittart, and Major Mostyn, of the Royal Sedleitz Dragoons.

The Honorable Mrs. Leach was a handsome widow, whose income was much beneath her requirements. She was acquainted with some colonials, who had come home in the same ship as Mr. West, and was indebted to them for an introduction to her present comfortable quarters. She had a smooth, slow sort of manner, a pair of wonderfully expressive eyes—and her own little plans. It did not suit her to walk with the guns, or join in long expeditions, entailing wear and tear of clothes, nerves, complexion, and tissues. She much preferred to lounge over a novel in the grounds, having breakfasted in her own room, and would appear at tea-time before the battered, sunburned, sun-blistered company, a miracle of cool grace, in a costume to correspond. And her brilliant appearance of an evening was a pleasure that was generally looked forward to. What toilets!—so rich, so well-chosen and becoming! What diamonds! (Yes; but these were the best French paste.) She made herself pleasant to every one, especially to Mr. West, and treated Madeline almost as if she were some fond elder sister.

Miss Pamela Pace was excessively lively—the soul of the party, always ready to shoot, ride, or fish; to play billiards, gooseberry, or the banjo; to dance or to act charades. She had a fund of riddles, games, and ghost stories. Without being pretty, she was neat, smart, and a general favorite.

Miss Lumley was her cousin and her foil—tall, fair, statuesque, and silent. However, she was a capital tennis and billiard player, and untiring pedestrian; and, as Lady Rachel talked enough for two ordinary women, she made up for Miss Lumley's shortcomings.

Lady Rachel was most anxious to get her brother settled—married to a nice girl, such as Madeline, with a large fortune, and she intended to forward the match in every way. She lost no opportunity of sounding Tony's praises to Madeline, or of plying him with encouragement and advice. Advice, especially given as such for his own good, he shirked, as a child does physic. He admired Miss West; she was unaffected; there was no nonsense about her; she was handsome and ladylike. She would accept him, of course; and he really might do worse. He did not particularly want to marry her, or any one; but his income, no matter how well contrived and cut, was far too small for a man of his position. And money was a pleasant thing.

Wound up by his anxious sister, Lord Tony had asked for and obtained Mr. West's permission to speak to his daughter, and now the only thing that remained to do was to ask the young lady to ratify the treaty. They had been nearly three weeks in Ireland, while this affair was quietly brewing.

Madeline had no suspicion of her father's wishes, or her suitor's intentions; such an idea would have filled her—as it subsequently did—

with horror. She liked dancing and tennis, and amusing herself as much as other young women of her age; but the notion of any one falling in love with her, in her new and attractive character, never once entered her brain. Pretty speeches and compliments she laughed at and turned aside; and it was generally mooted that the Australian heiress was as cold as the typical iceberg, and had a genius for administering the most crushing snubs if any one ventured on to the borderland, yea, the very suburbs of love-making; and it had been hinted that either there was some pauper lover in the background, or that Miss West was waiting for a duke—English or foreign—to lay his strawberry leaves at her feet. She thought Lord Tony extremely plain, and rather stupid; but he was so easily entertained, and cheery, and helped to make things go off well, that she was glad he formed one of the party. She had seen so much of him in London, she knew him better than any of their young men acquaintances; and he was always so good-tempered, so unassuming, and so confidential, that she entertained quite a sisterly regard for him.

Of Lord Anthony's present views and intentions she had no more idea than her pet Chinese spaniel. If he was *epris* with any one, it was with the dashing Pamela, who told his fortune by cards, and played him even at billiards, and his proposal came upon her without any preparation, and like a bolt from the blue. The bolt fell in this fashion, and on a certain sleepy Sunday afternoon.

Sunday at Clane had many empty hours. Mr. West was old-fashioned, and set his face against shooting, tennis, billiards, or even that curate's own game—croquet. The hours after lunch were spent in smoking, sleeping, novel-reading, devouring fruit in the big garden, or sitting under the lime-trees. It was thus that Lord Anthony found Madeline, surveying the misty haze of a hot August afternoon with a pair of abstracted eyes. Mr. West had given him a hint of her whereabout, and that here was the hour, and he was the man!

"She is a cold, undemonstrative, distant sort of girl," he explained. "She has never had a fancy, that I know of" (no, certainly as yet, he had not known of it). "She likes you, I am sure; it will be all plain sailing." And, thus encouraged, the suitor figuratively put to sea.

Madeline sat alone under the lime-trees in a low wicker chair, having been deserted by Lady Rachel, who had gone to have a comfortable snooze ere tea-time.

It was a drowsy afternoon; the bees buzzed lazily over a bed of mignonette, which sent its fragrance far and near. Madeline's book lay neglected in her lap. Her thoughts were far from it and Clane; they were with a certain hard-working barrister in London, who had written her a very rough, outspoken letter. Poor Laurence! Why could he not wait? Why could he not have patience? He was beginning to get on so well. She had seen a long review of one

of his articles in "Tooth and Nail." He was becoming quite a literary celebrity.

And, once he was up the ladder, even a few rungs, she would not feel the change so bitter, supposing her father was furious and implacable. Of course it would be a change! And she sighed as she smoothed out her cambric gown—which had cost eighteen guineas—with a pretty, delicate hand, laden with magnificent rings. Could it be possible that those soft white hands had ever blackened grates and made beds and washed up plates? Oh, such greasy plates and dishes!

"You seem to be in a day-dream, Miss West," said Lord Anthony, as he approached, "and all the rest of the folk have gone to sleep."

"Have they?" she exclaimed. "Well, one cannot wonder! It is a broiling afternoon, and, after that long sermon, you must make allowances."

"Oh, I'm always making allowances. I'm an easy-going sort of fellow, you know," and he cast himself into a well-cushioned chair. "I want to have a little talk with you." Hitching this chair nearer he added, "May I?"

"Why, of course! But are we in a talking humor? Isn't it rather hot? Pray don't bore yourself to entertain me! I can always amuse myself," and she slowly agitated her great green fan.

"Yes; I suppose you can say 'My mind to me a kingdom is'?" he asked, with a smile.

"I think I can," she answered languidly.

"I wish *I* could say as much. My mind is a

poor, barren, unpopulated country. I should like to take a trip into your territory, and share your pleasant thoughts, Miss West!" then suddenly spurred by a recollection of a solemn promise to his sister, and that he was wasting a golden opportunity, "I have something important to say to you."

"To say to *me?*" she echoed, with raïsed brows. "What can it be? What makes you look so strange? You are not feeling ill, are you?"

"Ill! No; but my mind is ill at ease. Can you not form an idea why?" leaning forward as he spoke, and looking straight into her eyes.

His look was an illumination to Madeline. But as yet she did not think of herself; she mentally glanced at lively Pamela, with her high spirits and low stature. She had seen her present companion carry his rather boisterous attentions to that young lady's shrine. She amused him, and his loud, long laugh often resounded in her neighborhood. He was come to ask for her good offices; but she did not suppose that Miss Pam would be unusually difficult to win.

"Oh, I think I have an idea now," she murmured, with a significant smile. "I have guessed."

"You have?" he replied, in a tone of great relief. "And—and, may I venture to hope?"

"I really cannot tell you. But I see no reason why you should not," she returned reassuringly.

"Madeline"—now moving his chair a whole foot nearer, and suddenly taking her hand—"you have made me the happiest of men!"

"I don't think I quite understand you," she replied, struggling to withdraw her fingers, and feeling desperately uncomfortable.

"Then I must speak out more plainly. I want you to promise to be my wife."

For a second she stared at him as if she could not credit her ears. Then she suddenly wrenched her fingers away, sprang to her feet, and stood facing him with crimson cheeks.

"What do you mean? Are you—mad?" she asked sharply.

"Mad?—no!" replied her suitor, both amazed and affronted. "One would think I was a dangerous lunatic, the way you behave. I am quite sane, and in deadly earnest. I have your father's good wishes, Rachel's good wishes—"

"My father's good wishes!" she interrupted, her mind in a perfect tumult at this totally unlooked-for dilemma.

"What is the matter with you, Miss West? Why are you so upset and agitated? Am I so totally unworthy? Is there anything so extravagantly strange in my wishing to marry you?"

"Oh, no, no!"—endeavoring to control her feelings, and not give herself away. "But—but—" A scarlet wave rushed into her cheeks. But what would Laurence say?

"Is it to be 'Yes' or 'No'?" he pleaded.

She simply shook her head, and drew back a step or two.

He had never been so near to loving this tall pretty girl, standing under the lime-trees with flushed, averted face, as now, when she shook

her head. "At least you will give me *reason*," he demanded, rather sulkily.

As the words left his lips he saw an odd change pass across her face, an expression that he could not understand. It was a look half of fear, half of contemptuous derision.

"There is no reason," she answered quietly, "beyond the usual one in a similar case. I do not wish to marry you."

"And why?" he asked, after an appreciable pause.

"Well, really, I have never thought about you, Lord Anthony, but as a pleasant acquaintance. As an acquaintance I like you very much," she answered, with astounding calmness. "An acquaintance — but nothing more." And she turned to take up her parasol.

Opposition always roused Lord Anthony; it acted as a spur. In a short five minutes he saw everything from his sister's point of view, and had suddenly developed a passion for Miss West.

"Every marriage begins by an acquaintance. Perhaps in time," he urged—"in a few short months, my dearest Madeline—"

"I am not your 'dearest Madeline,' Lord Anthony," she interrupted quickly. "Pray consider the subject closed once for all; and remember, for the future, that I am Miss West."

She was getting angry with his persistency. He was getting angry with her persistency.

There ensued a long silence, unbroken by speech. And at last he said—"There is some other fellow, of course. You are engaged already."

"I am not. Oh, Pamela, I did not see you" —as that vivacious young lady suddenly came upon the scene with a strong escort of dogs.

From her window she had noted the conference, and had hastily descended in order to discover what it might portend. A proposal! Well, if he had proposed, he had *not* been accepted, she remarked to herself complacently.

They both looked confused and ill at ease. Evidently they had been quarreling. Lord Anthony was ridiculously red, and Madeline was white as a sheet.

"How delightfully cool and comfortable you two look!" she mendaciously ejaculated, sinking into Madeline's chair with a gesture of exhaustion. "This is quite the nicest place, under these motherly old trees. I've been trying to sleep, but it did not come off. I was driven quite frantic by a diabolical blue-bottle that would not keep away from my face."

"I'm sure I don't wonder," said Lord Anthony, who was recovering his good temper, which was never lost for long.

"And so I came out. You will have tea here, Maddie, won't you, like a duck?"

"I'm not sure that ducks care for tea," rejoined Madeline. "Their weakness is snails. But I'll run in and order it. It must be after five." And in another minute her tall white figure was half way to the castle, and Miss Pamela and Lord Anthony were alone.

Both were eager to question the other in a delicate, roundabout way. Strange to say, the man

got out his query first. Throwing himself once more into a chair, and crossing his legs, he said—

"Girls know girls and their affairs, as men know men, and are up to their little games. Now, you saw a lot of Miss West in town. Same dressmaker, same dentist, same bootmaker. Look here, now; I want to know something." And he bent over and gazed into Miss Pam's pale little dancing eyes.

"I am quite at your service," she answered smilingly. "Her waist is twenty inches. She takes a longer skirt than you would think. She has no false teeth, and only a little stuffing in one back molar. Her size in shoes is fours."

"Bosh! What do I care about her teeth and her shoes? I want to know—and I'll do as much for you some day—if Miss West has any hanger-on—any lover loafing round? Of course I know she had heaps of Johnnies who admired her. But did she seem sweet on them? 'Lookers-on see most of the game.'"

"Yes, when there is any game to see," retorted the young lady. "In this case there was none. Or, if there was, it was double dummy."

"No one?" he said incredulously.

"No one," she answered. "She talks like an old grandmother, who has been through every phase of life; talks in the abstract, of course. She has never, as far as I know, and in the language of romance, 'smiled on any suitor.'"

"Most extraordinary!" muttered Lord Anthony. "A new woman who bars men. How-

ever, there is always the one exception; and, by George"—to himself—"I'll have another try!"

———

CHAPTER XIX

A DISAGREEABLE INTERVIEW

"WELL!" said Mr. West, when he found himself alone in the smoking-room with Lord Anthony. How much can be expressed in that exclamation.

"It was not well, sir. She will have nothing to say to me. I had no luck."

"Do you mean with Maddie?" exclaimed her father, in a tone of fretful amazement.

"Yes. I had a long talk with her, and she won't have anything to say to me!"

"What—what reason did she give you?" demanded Mr. West. "What reason, I say?"

"None, except that she did not wish to marry me; and she seemed to think that reason *enough*."

"And did you not press her?"

"It was of no use; but, all the same, I intend to try again—that is, if there is no one else, and Miss West has no attachment elsewhere."

"Attachment elsewhere? Nonsense!" irritably. "Why, she was at *school* till I came home—till she met me on the steamer with her governess! You saw her yourself; so you may put that out of your head. She's a mere girl, and does not know her own mind; but I know mine,

and if she marries to please me, I'll settle forty thousand pounds on her on her wedding day, and allow her five thousand a year. It's not many girls in England who have as much pinned to their petticoat; and she will have considerably more at my death. If you stick to Maddie, you will see she will marry you eventually. She knows you, and is getting used to you--coming in and out in London; and you have a great pull over other men, staying here in the same house, with lots of wet days perhaps!"

The following morning Madeline was sent for by her father. He felt that he could speak with more authority from the 'vantage ground of the hearthrug in his own writing-room; and after breakfast was the time he selected for the audience. Evidently Madeline had no idea of what was awaiting her, for she came up to him and laid her hand upon his arm and gave him an extra morning kiss.

"I suppose it's about this picnic to the Devil's Pie-dish?" she began.

In no part of the world has the devil so much and such a various property as in Ireland—glens, mountains, bridges, punch-bowls, bits, ladders —there is scarcely a county in which he has not some possessions—and they say he is a resident landlord.

Mr. West propped himself against the mantelpiece and surveyed her critically. She was certainly a most beautiful creature—in her parent's fond eyes—and quite fitted to be sister-in-law to a duke.

"It's not about the picnic; that must be put off, the day has broken. It's something far more important. Ahem!" clearing his throat. "What's all *this* about you and Foster?"

"Why?" she stammered, coloring deeply, and struck by a peculiar ring in his voice.

"*Why?*" impatiently. "He tells me that he proposed to you yesterday, and you refused him pointblank; and now, in my turn, *I* ask why?"

Madeline was silent. She began to feel very uncomfortable, and her heart beat fearfully fast.

"Well, is it true?" he demanded sharply.

"Yes, quite true," fiddling with her bangles.

"And may I know why you have said *no* to a highly eligible young man, of a station far above your own, the son of a duke, a man young, agreeable, whose name has never appeared in any flagrant society scandal, who is well-principled and—and—good-looking—a suitor who has my warmest approval? Come now." And he took off his glasses and rapped them on his thumb nail.

"I do not wish to marry," she replied in a low voice.

"And you *do* wish to drive me out of my senses! What foolery, what tommy rot! Of course, you *must* marry some day—you are bound to as my heiress; and I look to you to do something decent, and to bring me in an equivalent return for my outlay."

"And you wish me to marry Lord Anthony?" inquired his unhappy daughter, pale to the lips. Oh, if she could but muster up courage to con-

fess the truth! But she dared not, with those fiery little eyes fixed upon her so fiercely. "Father, I cannot. I cannot, indeed!" she whispered, wringing her hands together in an agony.

"Why?" he demanded in a hoarse dry voice.

"Would you barter me and your money for a title?" she cried, plucking up some spirit in her desperation, "as if I was not a living creature, and had no feeling. I *have* feeling. I have a heart; and it is useless for you to attempt to control it—it is out of your power!"

This unexpected speech took her parent aback. She spoke with such passionate vehemence that he scarcely recognized his gay, cool, smiling, and unemotional Madeline.

This imperious girl, with trembling hands, sharply knit brows, and low, agitated voice, was entirely another person. This was not Madeline, his everyday daughter. At last it dawned upon his mind that there was something behind it all, some curious hidden reason in the background, some secret cause for this astonishing behavior! Suddenly griping her arm in a vise-like grasp, as an awful possibility stirred his inflammable spirit, he whispered through his teeth—

"Who is it?"

"Who is who?" she gasped faintly.

Ah! now it was coming. She shook as if she had the ague.

"Who is this scoundrel, this low-born adventurer that you are in love with? Is it the man you knew at school? Is it the damned dancing-

master, or some half-starved curate? Is it him you want to marry? Madeline, on your oath," shaking her in his furious excitement and passion of apprehension, "is it him you want to marry?" he reiterated.

Madeline turned cold, but she looked full into the enraged face, so close to hers, and as he repeated, "On your oath, remember!" she answered with unfaltering and distinctly audible voice, "On my oath—*no!*" She spoke the truth, too! Was she not married to him already? Oh, if her father only guessed it! She dared not speculate on the idea! He would be worse, far worse than her worst anticipations. She could *never* tell him now.

"Father, I have said 'No,'" she continued. "Let go my hand, you hurt me." With the utterance of the last word she broke down and collapsed upon the nearest chair, sobbing hysterically.

"What the devil are you crying for?" he demanded angrily. "What I've said and done, I've done for your good. Take your own time, in reason; but marry you *shall*, and a title. Foster is the man of my choice. I don't see what you can bring against him. We will all live together, and, for my own part, I should *like* it. You go to no poorer home, you become a lady of rank—what more can any girl want? Money as much as she can spend, a husband and a father who hit it off to a T, both only too anxious to please her in every possible way, rank, and riches; what more would you have, eh?"

"Yes, I know all that!" gasped Madeline, making a great effort to master her agitation. She must protest now or never. "I know everything you would say; but I shall never marry Lord Anthony, and I would be wrong to let you think so. I like him; but, if he persists, I shall hate him. I have said 'No,' once; let that be sufficient for him—and *you!*" Then, dreading the consequences of this rashly courageous speech, she got up and hurried out of the room, leaving her father in sole possession of the rug, and actually gasping for speech, his thin lips opening and shutting like a fish's mouth—when the fish has just been landed. At last he found his voice.

"I don't care one (a big D) for Madeline and her fancies, and this thunder in the air has upset her. A woman's no means yes; and she shall marry Foster as sure as my name is Robert West." To Lord Anthony he said, "I'd a little quiet talk with Madeline, and your name came up. She admitted that she liked you; so you just bide your time and wait. Everything comes to those who wait."

To this Lord Tony nodded a dubious acquiescence. The poor fellow was thinking of his creditors. How would they like this motto? and how much longer would *they* wait?

"I told you she liked you," pursued Mr. West consolingly—"she said so; so you have not even to *begin* with a little aversion. She has set her face against marriage; she declared she would not marry, and what's more—and this scores for

you—she gave me her word of honor that there was no one she *wished* to marry. So it's a clear course and no favor, and the best man wins. And remember, Tony," said her shrewd little parent, thumping, as he spoke, that gentleman's reluctant shoulder, "that I back you, and it's a good thing to have the father and the money on your side, let me tell you."

Ten days went by very quietly—the calm after the storm. Mr. West never alluded to his daughter's foolish speech, and kissed her and patted her on the shoulder that selfsame night, as if there had been no little scene between them in the morning. He was waiting. Lord Anthony, even in Madeline's opinion, behaved beautifully. He did not hold himself too markedly aloof, and yet he never thrust his society upon her, or sought to have a word with her alone. He also was waiting.

CHAPTER XX

NOT "A HAPPY COUPLE"

THE postponed picnic to the Devil's Pie-dish eventually came off. It took place on the occasion of what was called "a holiday of obligation," when no good Catholics are allowed to work, but must put on their best clothes and attend mass. As there were no keepers or beaters available, the shooting-men meekly submitted to their fate, and started to the mountains, for once,

minus dogs and guns, and escorting a large assortment of ladies, in a break, landau, dog-cart, and jaunting-car. The morning was lovely; the treacherous sun smiled upon and beguiled the party to the summit of one of the mountains—a wild spot commanding a splendid view of river, forest, lake, and sea—a long, long climb, but it repaid the exertion. Luncheon was laid out in the Pie-dish, a green hollow between two peaks, and it was there discussed with great appreciation. The festive party sat long. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, mists began to collect, clouds to gather; the scenery at their feet grew dimmer and yet dimmer, the hypocritical sunshine vanished and gave way to rain, heavy, stinging rain. There was no shelter, not for miles, not a bush, much less a tree; but at a distance some one descried what looked like a *mound of stones*, but proved to be a cottage. To this dwelling every one ran at their utmost speed. It certainly was a house—a little humped-back cot that seemed as if it had been in the act of running down hill and had sat down. It consisted of a kitchen and bedroom, and the former could scarcely contain the company, even standing. There were one or two stools, a chest, and a chair. The atmosphere was stifling, but "any port in a storm"; anything sooner than the icy, cutting rain that swept the mountain. When their eyes became accustomed to the place, it turned out that besides smoke and hens, it contained an old woman, who sat huddled up by the fire enjoying a pipe, and

who stared stolidly and made no answer to eager inquiries for permission to remain. She was either stone deaf or silly, possibly both. But suddenly a barefooted girl entered, with a creel of wet turf on her back.

"I see yees running, and yees are kindly welcome," upsetting her load in a corner, and shaking out her wet shawl. "The grannie, there," pointing, "has no English; 'tis only Irish she can spake."

"Irish! Oh, I'd like to hear it so much!" cried Miss Pamela. "Oh, do make her talk!" Exactly as if she were alluding to some mechanical toy, such as a talking-doll.

"She's not much of a talker, at all, miss—and she's cruel old; and so many quality coming in on her at once has a bit stunned her. I'm sorry we are short of sates," looking round, and proffering the turf creel to Lady Rachel. "And I've no tay, but lashins of buttermilk."

"Never mind anything, thank you," said Mr. West pompously; "we have just lunched."

"Oh, an' is that yourself, me noble gentleman, from the castle below! An' 'tis proud I am to see yees. And here's Michael for ye," as a tall, dark countryman with long black whiskers entered, amazement at the invasion depicted in his dark blue eyes.

"'Tis a wet day, Michael," said Mr. West, who employed him as a beater.

"'Tis so, yer honor."

"Do you think it will last?" asked Madeline.

"I could not rightly say, miss; but I think not. It come on so sudden."

"I suppose you have been to the town to mass?"

"Yes, sir; second mass."

"Did you meet any friends, Micky? Did you get a drink?" inquired Lord Tony, insinuatingly.

"No, not to say a drink, sir."

"Well, what?"

"Just a *taste*."

"And if you were to be treated, Mick, what would you choose? Give it a name now," said Lord Tony, genially.

"Oh, whisky and porter!"

"What, together?"

"Ay. And why not? Sure, 'tis the best in many ways."

"What makes you say that?"

"Faix! an' with raison. If I drink porter I'm full before I'm drunk, ye see; if I drink whisky, I'm drunk before I'm full, and both together comes about right."

"Michael," cried his wife, "'tis you as ought to be dead ashamed, talking in such a coarse, loose way before the ladies! Ye has them all upset, so ye has." And, to make a diversion, she darted into the room and returned with (by way of a treat for the ladies) a baby in her arms. It had weak, blinking, blue eyes, was wrapped in an old shawl, and was apparently about a month old. However, it created quite the sensation its mother had anticipated.

"Oh, Lord," cried Mr. West, "a baby! I hate babies, though I like small children—espe-

cially little boys! Take it away before it starts screaming."

"Oh, show it to me! Let me have it!" came simultaneously from several quarters, but in each case the baby received its new friend with a yell, and had to be promptly returned to its apologetic parent. Several had tried their hand upon it; Miss Pam, Mrs. Leach, Miss Lumley, and Lady Rachel, had been repulsed in turn.

"Now, Maddie, let us see what way you would manage it, or if you know which end is uppermost!" said Lady Rachel, taking the child from its mother and laying it in Madeline's arms.

After a storm a calm! The irritable infant was actually quiet at last, and glared at his new nurse in silence, and while Madeline hushed it and rocked it and talked to it in a most approved fashion, the delighted mother and granny looked on with grateful surprise. And then the old lady made some loud remark in Irish, and pointed her pipe at Madeline.

"What does she say? Oh, do tell us?" cried Miss Pamela, excitedly. "*Do—do*, please."

"Oh, miss, dear, I—I—faix, then I couldn't!"

"'Tis no harm whatever," broke in Michael, with a loud laugh.

"Then out with it!" commanded Mr. West from a corner, where he was sitting on a kist, swaying his little legs high above the ground, and fully expecting to hear some pleasant Irish compliment about his daughter doing everything well.

"She says the lady has such a wonderful knack

that she must have had great practice entirely, and 'tis a married woman she is, with a baby of her own!"

This was not the description of speech that Mr. West or any one expected. He frowned heavily, looked extremely displeased, and growled out, "I think the old hag in the corner has been having some of your brew, Michael," while the rest of the party set up a sudden buzz of talking, to hide the unfortunate remark of the venerable semi-savage.

Poor Miss West! No one ventured to look at her save Lord Tony. She had bent her face over the baby, and her very forehead was crimson.

The captious weather now made a diversion; it was going to clear. People began to shake their capes and hats, to fumble for their gloves. Mrs. Leach—it was well there was no looking-glass, for every one was more or less damp and disheveled—felt her faultless fringe was perfectly straight, her feathers in a sort of pulp, thanks to the torrents upon a Kerry mountain. The torrents had ceased entirely, the deceitful sun was shining, and once more the picnickers sallied forth, not sorry to breathe a little fresh air. Mr. West had placed half a crown in Mrs. Riordan's hand, and received in return many blessings; but his daughter had pressed a whole sovereign into the infant's tiny palm, ere she followed her father and guests over the threshold.

And now to get home! The short grass was damp, noisy rivulets trickled boastfully after the rain, but the mountains and low country looked

like a brilliant freshly-painted scene: the hills were gay with gorse, cranberries, and bright purple heather, and dotted with sheep and little black cattle. The party now descended two and two—Lord Tony and Madeline the last. He was really in love with this pretty, tall girl who walked beside him, with a deer-stalker cap on her dark hair, a golf-cape over her graceful shoulders, and a lovely color, the result of rain and wind, in her charming face. The rain and wind had but enhanced *her* beauty. Yes; they would get on capitally; she would be not only a wife to be proud of, but a bonne camarade, ever gay, quick-witted, and good-tempered; a capital hostess and country gentleman's helpmate. How well she got over the ground, how nimbly she scaled the stiles, and climbed the loose walls without bringing down half a ton of stones. Here was another opportunity: speak he *would*. Gradually and clumsily he brought the subject round to the topic nearest his heart. His speech was half uttered, when she interrupted him, saying:

"Lord Anthony, I like you very much as a friend—"

"You need not offer me platonic friendship, because I won't have it, and I don't believe in it. No," he began impetuously. "And if you like me, I am quite content."

"Stop! Please let me finish. I like you so much that I am going to tell you a great secret."

"You are engaged to be married?" he exclaimed.

"No; I am married already."

Lord Tony halted. She also came to a full

stop, and they looked at one another in expressive silence.

She was wonderfully cool, while he was crimson with astonishment; his eyes dilated, his mouth quivered, his lower lip dropped.

"You are joking," he gasped out at last.

"No; indeed I am not."

"And where is your husband?"

"He is in London. My father does not know that such a person exists."

"Great Cæsar's ghost!"

"No; I have never dared to tell him yet. I married from school," she continued, and in a few hurried sentences gave the outline of her story, omitting her husband's name and profession, and all reference to her small son. "You see how I am situated. I have not ventured to tell the truth yet, and I confide my secret to your honor and your keeping."

"Of course it is perfectly safe," he began, rather stiffly, "and I feel myself very much honored by your confidence, and all that."

"Oh, Lord Tony, please don't talk to me in that tone," she exclaimed, with tears in her eyes. "I told you—because—you are what men call 'a good sort'; because I feel that I can rely upon you; because, though you like me, you don't really care for me, you know you don't; nor have I ever encouraged you or any man. My father is devoted to you; he is determined to—to—well—you know his wishes—and I want you to allow him to think that you have cooled, and have changed your mind. You—you understand?"

"And play the hypocrite all round?"

"Yes, but only for a little while."

"Rather hard lines, when I have *not* changed my mind. Is Rachel in the swindle?"

"No—oh, no!—no one but you and me and my husband, and a friend of his."

"And pray when do you intend to discharge your little domestic bomb?"

"When I go home. If I were to speak now, I should be turned out, probably on the hall door-steps, and the party would be broken up."

(Yes, and there were several good days' deer-stalking still in prospect, thought Lord Tony, much as he was concerned at this recent astounding confidence.) "I know you are dreadfully vexed," she said humbly; "but you will forgive me and stand by me, won't you?" and she looked at him appealingly. She had really most lovely and expressive eyes; who could refuse them anything?

"Meaning, that I am to neglect you openly, slight you on all occasions?"

"There is a medium; you need not be *too* marked in your defection, unless you like"—with a short, hysterical laugh.

"I don't *like* the job at all, but I will lend you a hand, and be a party to the fraud. Whoever is your husband, Mrs. What's-your-name, is a deuced lucky fellow!"

"Then it is a bargain, that you keep my secret?"

"Yes; here is my hand on it!"

At this instant (it is constantly the way) Mr. West paused and looked behind, and was ex-

tremely pleased. He had intended to shout to this tardy pair to hurry on, for the carriages were waiting, the horses, of course, catching cold. However, he must make allowances, under the circumstances.

Evidently Tony had come to the point again, and been accepted. He hastened down the road in great delight, hustled the company into various vehicles, and departed in the landau vis-a-vis to Mrs. Leach (the wretched condition of her hair and complexion discounted many delightful recollections of her beauty); and he took care to leave the *dog-cart* behind, for the sole use of the happy couple.

END OF PART ONE



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BY

B. M. CROKER

Author of "Diana Barrington," "A Family Likeness," etc.

IN TWO PARTS—PART TWO

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Issued Semi-Monthly. Entered at the Post-Office at New York as second-class matter.
PETER FENELON COLLIER, PUBLISHER, 523 W. 13TH ST., N. Y.

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MARRIED OR SINGLE?

CHAPTER XXI

AN INTERRUPTION

It was certainly strange that Lord Tony had not sought him out the evening after the picnic, said Mr. West to himself, considering that it was all settled now. Indeed, it struck him that his future son-in-law pointedly avoided him, and had lounged out of the smoking-room when he found himself with him alone. Of course, Lord Tony was aware that his consent was granted, but he would have liked him to have come to him at once. The next day, despite an effort to escape, Mr. West captured his reluctant quarry en route to the stables, and said, as he overtook him, rather out of breath, "Well, my boy, I see you made it all right yesterday! Why have you not been to tell the old man—eh?" and he beamed upon him and poked him playfully with his cane.

Lord Tony suddenly found himself in a very nice moral dilemma. Oh! here was a fix and no mistake!

"There is nothing to tell yet, Mr. West," he blurted out.

"What! when I saw you both philandering

behind the party hand-in-hand, and—and—left you the dog-cart on the strength of it!"

"Oh, I only took Miss West's hand for a moment—to—to ratify a promise."

"Promise of what?" impatiently.

"A promise of her friendship," stammered his companion. It was a moment of mental reservations.

"Oh!" with an expression of deepest scorn. "That wasn't the way we made love when I was a young man. What a miserable milk-and-watery set you are! Friendship!"

"Yes, I know there is a falling off," admitted Lord Tony, with humility. "But we are not as energetic in any way as the last generation. We prefer to take things easy, and to take our own time. Miss West is young—'marry in haste and repent at leisure,' you know," he pursued collectedly. "You must not rush Miss West, you know. She—she—all she asks for is *time.*"

"Did she *name* any time?"

"Er—well—no."

"I'm afraid you mismanaged the business—eh? You just leave it to me. *I'll* arrange it!"

"No—no—no. That's just the one thing I bar. Interference would dish the whole concern. I beg and implore of you to leave—a—well alone—for the present, at any rate. Miss West and I understand one another."

"I'm glad of that; for I'm blessed if I understand *either* of you!" exclaimed his disgusted listener.

"Ah! hullo, there goes Miss Pace, and I

promised to play tennis with her. I must go and get my bat and shoes." Exit.

At the end of September the tide of enjoyment at Clane was at its height. Theatricals were in rehearsal—that fertile field for flirtation and fighting. The bags of the season had been enviably heavy; the poor neighbors were sensible of a pleasant circulation of money and new ideas; prices were rising steadily. The wealthy neighbors appreciated Mr. West's princely hospitality, and spoke of him as "not a bad sort in his way, though a shocking little bounder." Mrs. Leach had prolonged her visit, and her attentions to her host were becoming quite remarkable. He was not an ardent sportsman; his short legs were unaccustomed to striding over the heather-clad mountains; he did not want to shoot deer—in fact, he was rather afraid of them. So he left the delights of his shooting to well-contented, keen young men, and was easily beguiled into long saunters among the grounds and woods in the siren's company. To tell the truth, they were not much missed, and they frequently rested on rustic seats, and talked to one another with apparent confidence—flattering confidence. He spoke of Madeline's future—his earnest desire to see her suitably married. "A girl like her might marry a duke; don't you think so, Mrs. Leach?"

"She might," said the lady, but without a trace of enthusiasm in her voice—in fact, there was an inflection of doubt. "She is undeniably lovely, but—"

"But what?"

"I—well—I am sentimental" (about as sentimental as a charwoman), "and I have my own ideas. I think that dear Madeline has a private romance: that she either cares for some one whom she can never marry—"

"That's nonsense," interrupted her companion, impatiently. "I have her word of honor that there is no one she wants to marry."

"Oh, well, she may have loved and *lost*," said the lady, sweetly; "for, speaking as a woman, it is inconceivable that a girl who is, or was, heart-free could be absolutely indifferent to *every one*. She has dozens of admirers, for she is not only very pretty, but"—and she smiled enchantingly into Mr. West's little eyes—"very rich—your heiress. It is my opinion that Madeline has some little closet in her heart that you have never seen—that she is constant to some memory. Of course, time tries all things, and in time this memory will fade; but I am positive that dearest Madeline will not marry for some years." Then she tapped his arm playfully. They were sitting side-by-side in a shady path in the vast pleasure grounds. "You will be married before her *yourself*."

"I—I—marry! I have never dreamed of such a thing."

"Why not, pray? You are comparatively young. A man is always young, until he is really going downhill. A man is young at fifty. Now, look at a woman at fifty!" and she paused expressively.

He turned his eyes upon her. Little did he suppose that he was contemplating a woman of fifty—a woman who was extravagant, luxurious, dreadfully in debt, almost at the end of her resources and her friends' forbearance, and who was resolved upon marrying him whom she had once called "that vulgar horror, the little Australian squatter."

He looked at her with a rather shamefaced air and a grin. Alas! flattery was hurrying him to destruction. She was an extremely handsome woman, of the Juno type—erect, stately, with bright, dark eyes, dark hair, a short straight nose, and beautiful teeth (some were her own). She was dressed in a pale yellow muslin, with white ribbons, and wore a most fascinating picture-hat and veil; her gloves, shoes, and sunshade were of the choicest, and it was not improbable that, in the coming by-and-by, Mr. West would have the pleasure of paying for this charming toilet.

"A woman of fifty," she pursued, "is an old hag; her day has gone by, her hour of retreat has sounded. She is gray, stout—ten to one, unwieldy—and dowdy. Now, a *man* of fifty shoots, hunts, dances as he did when he was twenty-five—in fact, as far as dancing goes, he is thrice as keen as the ordinary ball-room boy, who simply won't dance, and is the despair of hostesses!"

"I've never thought of marrying," he repeated. "Never!"

"No; all your thoughts are for Madeline, I

am aware, and the alliance she is to make; but my motto is, 'Live while you live; live your own individual life, and don't starve on the scraps of other people's good things.' "

"Do you think any one would have me, Mrs. Leach?" he asked, as he leaned on his elbow and looked up into her glorious eyes.

She was the Honorable Mrs. Leach, well-connected, fashionable, handsome, and—oh, climax! —"smart." Yes, the idea was an illumination. How well she would look at the head of his table and in the landau!

"Dear Mr. West, how humble you are! I am sure you would—(she meant his money)—make any reasonable woman happy." She glanced at him timidly, and looked down and played coyly with her châtelaine.

What eyelashes she had, what a small white ear, what a pretty hand! His own was already gently laid upon it, the words were actually on his lips, when a bare-headed page burst through an adjacent path breathless from running. He had a telegram in his hand, and halted the moment he caught sight of his master, who instantly withdrew his hand and became the alert man of business.

Mrs. Leach was a lady, so she was unable to breathe an oath into her mustache—had oaths been her safety-valve. She, however, thought some hasty thoughts of round-faced pages who brought telegrams (which she kept to herself). Mr. West, however, was not so self-possessed. As soon as he cast his eyes over the telegram he

gave vent to a loud exclamation of impatience, and then subsided into an inarticulate mutter, while the page and the lady devoured him with their eyes!

"Bad news, I'm afraid," she said sympathetically.

"Um—ah, yes. My stockbroker in London has made a most confounded mess of some business Buys in when I tell him to sell out. I wish I had him by the ear this minute "

"Is there an answer, sir?" asked the page.

"Yes; I'm coming in directly. Tell the fellow to wait." And Mr. West and the handsome widow turned toward the house.

This vile telegram had entirely distracted his ideas. His mind was now fastened on the Stock Exchange, on the money market; he had not a thought to spare for the lady beside him.

"It's the twenty-ninth, is it not?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I must go home sooner than I intended. I shall have to be in London next week. The fox is his own best messenger" (and the fox was going to escape!).

Mrs. Leach had intended remaining in her present comfortable quarters for another fortnight. This odious telegram had upset her plans.

"Then you will not return here?"

"Oh, no. What would be the good of that?"

"It seems a pity. You will be losing all the lovely autumn tints. October is a charming month."

"Yes; but it is not charming when some one at a distance is making ducks and drakes of your coin, and I'd rather see the color of my own money again than any autumn tint," was the practical remark

"I have had a most delightful visit here. I shall never, never forget dear Clane, nor all your kindness and hospitality."

"You must come to us in London."

"Thank you so much, and I shall always be delighted to chaperon dear Maddie at any time. A girl like her is in such a difficult position. She is very young, you know, to go out without a married lady. Of course, you are a host in yourself; but—"

"But Lady Rachel and Mrs. Lorraine take Maddie out, you know," broke in Mr. West, "and a girl can go anywhere with her father."

"Now there, dear Mr. West, I differ with you totally—indeed I do. A girl should have an older woman as well—a woman for choice who has no young people of her own, who is well-connected, well-looking, well-dressed, and who knows the ropes, as they say." She was sketching a portrait of herself. "And Madeline is so remarkably pretty, too, the observed of all observers. I am so fond of her. She *is* so sweet. I almost feel as if she were my own daughter. Ah! I never had a daughter!" (But she could have a step-daughter; and if she was once established as Madeline's friend and chaperon, the rest would be an easy matter.)

"I am very sorry to have to leave Clane sooner

than I expected; but business is business. Business first, pleasure afterward."

"And you have given us all a great deal of pleasure. I don't know such a host anywhere; and it has been such a comfort to me to talk to you about my hateful law business, and to tell you things unreserveldy, and consult you. My odious brother-in-law, Lord Suckington, never will assist me, and I never seem to be out of the hands of my solicitors. Ah, here is your horrid telegraph boy waiting. May I go in and order tea, and pour you out a cup?"

. . . . . .

In ten days' time the entire party had dispersed. Madeline and her father traveled over to London. As the latter took leave of Mrs. Leach at Mallow Junction, and saw her into the Cork train, that warm-hearted lady, looking bewitching in a charming traveling-cloak and hat, leaned out of the window and whispered as she pressed his hand, "Good-by, or, rather, *au revoir*. Be *sure* you write to me!"

And was it possible that he had seen a tear in her eye?

CHAPTER XXII

MR. WYNNE'S VISITOR

And meanwhile what of Laurence Wynne? His short, smart sketches had made a hit. He was becoming a man of mark in literary as well as legal circles, and was overwhelmed with invitations to dinners, luncheons, and "at homes"; for be it known that Laurence Wynne was looked upon with favorable eyes by not a few mammas and daughters as a clever, rising, good-looking young bachelor. Some had heard a vague rumor that there once upon a time had been a Mrs. Wynne, a girl whom he had married out of a lodging house or restaurant, but who, fortunately for him, had died in the first year of her marriage. Some said this was not true, some said it was. All agreed with extraordinary unanimity in never alluding to Mrs. Wynne in his company. After all, in these days of feverish haste, a story is soon forgotten, and people have too much to do to waste time in turning over the back pages of other folks' lives. The ladies had not been slow in picking up sun-

dry hints and allusions to "Wynne," as dropped across dinner tables by their husbands and fathers, and not a few hospitable families had made up their minds that they would cultivate Mr. Wynne.

In vain they were assured that he was not a society man and hated ladies—which, of course, was nonsense. He was busy and industrious, that was all; and now and then he did come out of his shell, and sit at their tables, and stand against the wall at their dances, and made himself so agreeable that he was figuratively patted on the back, and requested to come again; but he so seldom came again.

It was part of his duty, he told himself, to be on good terms with his august seniors—to respond to their first invitations, to make himself pleasant to their wives and daughters, hand teacups, turn over music, open doors, talk suitable commonplaces; but when any of these same young ladies sat down, so to speak, before him, and commenced to open the trenches for a flirtation, he began to feel uncomfortable. Long ago, before he met Madeline West, this sort of thing was well enough—but even then a little of it had gone a long way.

Now, with Madeline in the background, and amusing herself, no doubt very delightfully, and not thinking of him, he could not—no, he could not—like others less conscientious, laugh and exchange sallies and cross swords and glances with any of these pretty, sprightly girls, knowing full well in his heart that he was all the time that

wolf in sheep's clothing—*a married man!* And then he was critical at heart, and hard to please.

As he looked round the various groups at picnics and tennis parties—he now and then went for an hour—he saw no one who approached Madeline in any way—face, figure, grace, or gait—especially Madeline as he had last seen her—in her very fine feathers. Doubtless any of these girls would have made a more manageable wife, he thought to himself bitterly. Yes! she had now taken the bit completely within her teeth, and he was powerless to control her. She went and came and stayed away when she pleased, and for precisely as long as it suited her. Her desertion—it was that—was all in pursuit of his interests—his and the child's. What a fool she must think him! She had evidently resolved to play the *role* of daughter first, wife next, and mother very much the last of all! Her neglect of him he could tolerate, but her neglect of her child made him excessively angry. She had wholly consigned it to Mrs. Holt, and lightly shaken off all a mother's duties. She a mother! She did not look the part as she chattered fashionable gossip to those idiotic young men on Euston platform, and never cast a thought to the infant she was turning her back on in a certain country farmhouse. She had been away nearly four months, and she had written—oh, yes, pretty frequently, but the tone of her letters was a little forced, their gayety was not natural—perhaps the tone of his own epistles was somewhat curt. The relations between Mr. and Mrs.

Wynne were becoming strained—a crisis was impending.

. . . . . .

Among the departures from Kingstown on a certain date were Mr. and Miss West and suite, who duly arrived at Belgrave Square, and found London filling fast. Their arrival, however, was somewhat unexpected—the housekeeper had barely time to dispatch her sister's family back to Manchester, and the poor woman was compelled to put off an evening party for which she had issued invitations among her own set.

Mr. West had a great deal of business to transact, and spent most of his days in the City—and this was Madeline's opportunity.

She lost no time in paying a visit to the Inner Temple, arriving on foot, plainly dressed, and wearing a thick veil. She was a good deal bewildered by the old courts and passages, but at last discovered Mr. Wynne's chambers. Here she was received by an elderly, bare-armed, irascible-looking woman—with a palpable beard—who, after looking her over leisurely from heard to foot, told her to "Go up to the second flight front. She could tell nothing of Mr. Wynne; he was in and out all day, like a dog in a fair."

Further up the narrow stairs she came face to face with two gentlemen, who paused—she felt it—and looked back at her as she knocked and rang at the door of "Mr. Laurence Wynne." Truly, such an elegant-looking young lady was not to be met about the old Temple every day;

and never had such an apparition been seen on Mr. Wynne's landing. The outer room was occupied by two clerks, who stared at the visitor in unqualified amazement. Here was something spicy in the shape of a client! Very, very different to the usual run. "A breach of promise," was their immediate and mutual idea. Something more to the purpose than cranky old fogies fighting about rights of way or an involved legacy case. This was a pretty girl, and a swell.

So much they noted with their sharp, semi-judicial eyes as she stood timidly in the doorway and raised her veil.

One of them instantly bounded off his seat, and asked what he could do for her?

"Could she see Mr. Wynne?" she faltered, as her eyes roved round the outer office, with its great double desk piled with documents, its rows of law books ranged round the room on staggering, rickety shelves, its threadbare carpet, its rusty fender, its grimy windows, and last, not least, two bottles of stout, and a pewter mug.

Still, these two youths might be Laurence's clerks. Could it be possible? Could it be possible that these immense piles of papers concerned Laurence? If so, he was getting on—really getting on at last. But what a horrible musty place! The very air smelled of dust and leather and law books.

"Mr. Wynne, miss, did you say? Very sorry, but Mr. Wynne is in court," said the clerk, briskly.

"When will he be back?" she inquired, ad-

vancing and standing in the front of another door, evidently Mr. Wynne's own sanctum.

"Afraid I cannot say, miss; he is to speak in the case of Fuller *v.* Potts—breach of contract. Any business, any message—"

But the words died upon his lips—this uncommonly cool young party had actually walked into Mr. Wynne's own sitting-room.

"It's all right," she remarked carelessly, divining his horror. "Mr. Wynne knows me."

And she went and sat down in his armchair, in front of a table piled with documents, all more or less neatly tied up and docketed.

There were numbers of letters under little weights. There was a law book, a couple of open notes, and all the apparatus of a busy legal man. She shrugged her shoulders and looked round the room; it was dingy and shabby (furniture taken at a valuation from the last tenant); the carpet between the door and the fireplace was worn threadbare, as if it were a pathway—which it was.

Another pathway ran from the window to the wall, which the inmate had probably paced as he made up his speeches. There was her especial abomination, horse-hair furniture, a queer spindle-legged sideboard, some casual old prints on the wall; certainly there was nothing in the room to divert Laurence's attention. Outside there was no prospect beyond a similar set of chambers, a very ugly block of buildings, and one forlorn tree waving its branches restlessly to and fro.

She got up and glanced into an adjoining apartment. The clerks were not now watching her—Mr. Wynne did not tolerate idleness. This was his bedroom, a still barer scene. No carpet whatever, no curtains, a small iron bedstead, a big bath, a battalion of boots. Laurence, she remembered, was always extremely particular about his boots, and *hated* to wear them when patched; these were whole, well cut, and in good case. There was a sixpenny glass on the wall, a painted chest of drawers and washstand, also one chair. Spartan simplicity, indeed! What a horrible contrast to her own luxurious home! She closed the door with a little shudder, and as she did so a quantity of large, important-looking cards and envelopes, stuck about the dusty chimney piece mirror and the pipe-rack, caught her eye, and she immediately proceeded to examine them with dainty fingers.

"Blest if she ain't overhauling his invitations!" exclaimed one of the clerks, who, by tilting his chair back until it was at a most hazardous angle, caught a glimpse of what he and his co-adjutor began to think was "Mr. Wynne's young woman."

"Her cheek beats all! Shall I go and interfere?" asked the first speaker, in an awestruck whisper.

"No; you just leave her alone," said number two, who had the bump of caution well developed. "It ain't our business; but I *did* think he was about the last man in the world to have a lady coming and routing among his things. There

ain't nothing that she'll find as will make her any wiser," he concluded contemptuously.

But here he was mistaken! She discovered a great deal that surprised her much—very much. Here were cards from old judges and stupid law fogies, requesting the pleasure of Mr. Wynne's company at dinner. That was easily understood. But there were several invitations to entertainments to which she and her father had been bidden! and also, what was the strangest thing of all, blazoned cards of invitation to houses to which her father had not been able to obtain an *entree*, smile he never so assiduously on the smart or noble hosts. She stood for several minutes with one of these precious cards in her hand, and turned it over reflectively as she recalled the desperate and unavailing efforts of her parent to obtain a similar honor—the toadying, the flattery, the back-stair crawling that it made her crimson to recall! And, such is poor human nature—poor, frail human nature!—this bit of pasteboard did more to raise her husband in her estimation than all the briefs she saw piled upon his desk. She now began to contemplate him from a new point of view. Hitherto she had been very fond of Laurence—in a way—her own way. He had been good to her when she had no friends, he had borne their poverty with wonderful patience. Yes, certainly he had. But she had thought—rather resentfully at times—that a man without some preparation for such a rainy day as they had experienced ought not to have married; he should have left her as he found

her. She did not hold these views at the time. She liked Laurence better than any one, all the same; but the horrible intimacy of dire want had bred—well, yes, a little contempt; his illness, his helplessness had made her put herself somewhat above him in her own secret thoughts. She (for a time) had been bread-winner and house-band, and well and bravely she had struggled at that desperate crisis; but, alas! that it must be recorded, riches had spoiled her. She had inherited a luxurious, pleasure-loving nature, which cultivation had fostered, until, from a small and scarcely noticeable plant, it had grown into an overwhelming jungle! The longer she lived in her father's home the less disposed was she to return to her own modest rooftree; and especially, looking round with a wry face, to such a place as this! She was now necessary to her father. He was something (he said) of an invalid; while Laurence was young and strong. Every day she was hoping to see her way to making the great disclosure, and every day the chance of making that disclosure seemed to become more and more remote. Laurence was evidently well thought of in influential circles, and, "of course, Laurence is of good family. Any one can see that at a glance," she mentally remarked; "and, no doubt, his own people had now taken him by the hand."

The discovery that he moved in a set above her own had raised him in her opinion. Latterly she had been looking down on Laurence, as already stated—perhaps only an inch or so, but

still, she placed herself above him. He had drawn a great and unexpected prize in the matrimonial lottery, but he scarcely seemed to realize the value of his treasure! She had bracketed Laurence mentally with obscurity, shabbiness, and poverty, and had a vague idea that only through her means could he ever emerge into the sunshine of prosperity. She had a kind of protecting affection for him, dating from the days when she had starved for his sake, and made his bed and his beef tea, and washed his shirts. She looked down upon him just a little. It is possible to be fond of a man and to entertain this feeling. And now Laurence's busy clerks, and these coroneted envelopes had given her ideas a *shock*. She went over and stood in the window and drummed idly upon the small old-fashioned panes, where not a few names and initials were cut. As she stood thus—certainly a very pretty figure to be seen in any one's window, much less that of an avowed anchorite like Laurence Wynne—a young gentleman sauntered to the opposite casement, with his hands in his pockets and his mouth widely yawning, as if he were on the point of swallowing up the whole premises. He paused in mute astonishment, and gazed incredulously across the narrow lane that divided the two buildings. Then Madeline distinctly heard him shout in a stentorian voice—

"I say, Wallace, come here, quick—quick, and look at the girl in Wynne's window! My wig, ain't that a joke?"

On hearing this summons she instantly backed

out of sight, and had the amusement of seeing three heads peering across, vainly endeavoring to catch a glimpse of the promised apparition. However, they saw her depart—although she was not aware of the fact—and they were highly pleased with her figure, her walk, and her feet, and took care to tell Mr. Wynne of their gratifying and flattering opinion, and to poke him in the ribs with a walking-stick—not as agreeable or facetious an action as it sounds—and to assure him that "he was a sly old bird, and that still waters run deep, and that they had no idea he had such good taste;" all of which witticisms Mr. Wynne took in anything but good part, especially as he could not tell them that the lady upon whom they passed such enthusiastic encomiums was his wife. Indeed, if he had done so they would only have roared with laughter, and flatly refused to believe him.

Madeline waited three-quarters of an hour, and then made up her mind to return home. As she walked through the outer office, once more thickly veiled, the alert clerk sprang forward to open the door. As he held it back, with an inky hand he said, with a benevolent grin—

"When Mr. Wynne comes back, who shall I say called, miss?"

Madeline hesitated for a moment, and then, turning to the youth in her most stately manner, said—"Say Miss West," and having thus left her name, with all due dignity she passed through the door with a slight inclination of her head and walked downstairs.

She met a good many cheery-looking young barristers, in wigs and flyaway gowns, as she passed through the precincts of the inns, and wondered if she would come across Laurence, and if she would recognize him in that funny dress. For, of course, he wore a wig and gown too; but he had always kept them in his chambers, and she had never seen them. But she did not meet Laurence—so she took a hansom, did a little shopping in Bond Street, and then got home just in nice time for afternoon tea.

As she sat sipping it in her luxurious tea-jacket, and with her feet on the fender-stool, Mr. Wynne returned home, tired, hoarse, and cold. His fire was out. And, moreover, there was no sign of his modest evening meal.

"Confound that old hag downstairs!" he muttered.

"Please, sir," said one of the clerks, who had been busy locking up, and who now followed him into his sanctum, "there was a party to see you while you were out—a party as waited for a good bit of an hour."

"Well, well, couldn't you have dealt with him?" impatiently. "What did he want?"

"It was a lady," impressively.

"A lady!" he echoed. "Oh, yes, I know, old Mrs. Redhead—about that appeal—"

"No, it was not; it was a young lady."

"Oh, a young lady?" he repeated.

"Yes, and she bid me be sure to tell you," embroidering a little to give color to his story,

"as she was very sorry not to see you, and to say that Miss West had called."

"Miss West? Are you sure she said West?"

"Yes, sir. I'll take an oath to it, if you like."

"All right, then. Yes, yes, it's all right. You can go," dismissing him with a wave of his arm, and, suddenly pitching his wig in one direction and his gown in another, he sat down to digest the news.

So Madeline had come to beard him in his den. What did it all mean? and did she intend to return?

For fully an hour he sat in the dusk—nay, the darkness—pondering this question, forgetful of fire, light, and food. He would have liked to have cross-examined his clerk as to where she sat, and what she said; but no, he could not stoop to that; and then his mind reverted again to that crucial and as yet unanswered question —"Did she intend to come back?"

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CHAPTER XXIII

A BOLD STEP

Mr. West announced that he was obliged to run down to Brighton on business and would not return until late that night, and he commanded his daughter to write and ask Lady Rachel to come and lunch, and spend the day. At lunch time Lady Rachel duly drove up, and rustled in, full of gossip, full of vitality, and dressed out in the last suggestion of the winter's fashion. She had a great deal to tell about a grand dinner at a great house the previous evening, and retailed volubly and at length—the *menu*, the names of the guests—twenty-six—and the dresses of the ladies.

"I wore a new frock, rather a daring style, geranium-red, silk skirt and sleeves, and a white satin body, veiled in black net, and embroidered in steel sequins. But it really *was* sweet—one of Doucet's. I dare not think of the price. However, it suited me—so my cavalier assured me."

"You asked him?"

"I don't think I did. He was a barrister. Barristers are looking up! Yes, another chicken cutlet, please," holding out her plate — the Jeameses were banished. "And such a good-looking young man—a Mr. Wynne. My dear, you are giving me oyster sauce!" she screamed. "What *are* you thinking about? And, oh—where was I—what was I saying? Yes, about Wynne. He was so amusing, and said such witty things. I wish I could remember half—nay, any one of them—and pass them off as my own. It was more the way he said them, though. And Madeline, my love," laying down her knife and fork, as if suddenly overwhelmed by the recollection, "he had the most irresistible dark eyes I ever looked into!"

"Ever looked into?" repeated Madeline. "You —you seem quite impressed," breaking up her bread rather viciously.

She—no, well she did not like it! How dared any woman talk of her husband's irresistible dark eyes? And Laurence, had he been flirting? Could he flirt? Lady Rachel was an irreclaimable coquette.

"He is coming to dine with us next Sunday week. I wish you could come too, and see my new lion. They say he is awfully clever. Writes such smart articles, and scarifies us poor women. The emancipated female is his particular horror."

"Indeed! How very pleasant!"

"But men like him, which is always a good sign. They say he is going into Parliament some day."

"If you are going to make a lion of every one who is said to be going into the House of Commons, you will be able to stock every menagerie in Europe," retorted Madeline, dusting crumbs off her lap.

"Or that I shall discover a good many asses under lions' skins, eh? I mentioned you, *ma belle*, and asked if he had ever heard of you, and he said yes. See what it is to be a social celebrity! And I told him that you were the prettiest girl and greatest heiress in London—and that he really *ought* to know you."

"And—and what did he say?" turning a salt cellar round and round.

"Oh, I'm not quite sure what he said beyond that he was a busy man, and—oh, yes, that he detested the genus heiress."

And then the vivacious matron led the conversation away to another topic, and Madeline led the way to her boudoir. Presently Lady Rachel announced that she had an engagement at four o'clock, and that she could not remain for tea—not even if Madeline went on her knees to her, a feat that Maddie had no desire to perform—and finally she rushed off in a sort of mild whirlwind of good-bys, kisses, and last messages—screamed from the hall and stairs.

Then Madeline sat alone over the fire, and reflected on what she had heard with keen discomfort, while she stupidly watched the red coals. Laurence had not answered her last two letters—he had not taken any notice of her call. Of course, he could not come to the house; but at

least he might have written. He had no right to treat her as if she was a naughty child. He was entirely relieved of the burden of her support; he could start well and unweighted in the race. She would pay for Harry too. Her father was impossible at present; he was dreadfully worried about money matters—he was ill. She was doing her best for Laurence and Harry. Surely, he knew that, and that she would rather be with them than here. But as she glanced at her magnificent surroundings, and at her silver tea equipage, just brought in by two powdered servants, with a request to know "if there were any orders for the carriage?" her heart misgave her.

Would not Laurence think that she preferred all this—that this wealth was her attraction, luxury her idol—an idol that had cast out him and poor little Harry?

She made a sudden decision. She would go and see Laurence. Yes, that very evening partake of his frugal dinner—a chop, no doubt—and coax him into a better frame of mind, and a better humor with herself. She would wear her usual evening toilet, and give him an agreeable surprise. The idea pleased her. She swallowed down her tea, ran quickly up to her room, and rang for Josephine.

"Josephine," she said, as that very smart person appeared, "I am going out to dine with a friend—an old friend that I knew when I was at school. I want to look my very best, though it will not be a party, only one or two. What

shall I wear?" beginning to pull off her velvet morning-gown.

"Well, miss, for two or three—a quiet dinner, but smart no doubt—your primrose satin with the chiffon body, just lighted with a few brilliants. I'll do your hair in the new knot, and run the diamond arrow through it."

This simple toilet occupied a considerable time. What with dressing Madeline's hair, lacing her gown, arranging her ornaments, it was nearly seven before the great business was completed; but it was finished at last to Josephine's entire satisfaction.

"Well, mademoiselle, I never saw you look better—no, nor as well!"

Madeline could not refrain from a smile as she glanced at her reflection in the mirror; but her present sweet complacency was but momentary. There was a bitter drop in the cup. Was it for this, asked Madeline—this costly dress, those diamonds, and such-like delights—that she sacrificed her home?

"No!" she retorted angrily, aloud, and much to Josephine's astonishment. "No, it is *not*."

Yet even so she was but half convinced. She was presently enveloped in a long crimson velvet mantle reaching to the ground, and trimmed with furs that were as much an outward and visible sign of Mr. West's wealth as his house and carriage—Russian sables. Then she tied a scarf over her head, took up her fan and gloves, and, in spite of Josephine's almost impassioned appeals to take a footman and go in the brough

am, set out in a hansom alone. She herself gave the reply through the trap, in answer to the "Where to, miss?"

And the attendant footman could not catch the address.

There was a flavor of wild adventure about the whole expedition that made her heart beat unusually fast. The idea of taking Laurence by storm in his musty chambers, of cajoling him into a more amenable frame of mind, of dining with him *tête-a-tête*, of trying the effect of her much-augmented charms upon her own husband —for she had now fully learned to know the value of youth, beauty, and dress—all carried her away out of her usual somewhat languorous frame of mind.

She felt a little nervous as she stepped out of the hansom in the vicinity of the gloomy old Temple, and proceeded to Laurence's chambers, as before, on foot.

Fortunately the pavement was dry and her dainty shoes were none the worse.

She came to the door, and rang a pretty loud peal *this* time, smiling to herself as she thought of Laurence sitting over his solitary meal, probably by the light of an equally solitary candle.

The door was opened by a curious jerk, and by some invisible agency, and she beheld before her, half way up the stairs, the bearded beldame, carrying a heavy tray, who, unable to turn her head, shouted out querulously—"If that's the washing, come in. I hope to gracious you've done his shirts a bit better nor last week. They

were a sight; and his collars! deary, deary me!"

And thus ejaculating, she rounded the staircase, and was lost to view; but still she shouted, though her voice did *not* come like a falling star.

"You can go in by the other door, and lay them in his bedroom, and leave the basket."

Madeline was half suffocated with suppressed laughter as she tripped quickly up after this authoritative old person, and as she went she removed her head gear, and when she came to the top landing, she rapidly divested herself of her long cloak.

The old woman was already in the outer office, which was lit, and had deposited her load upon a table when, hearing a rustle and a footfall, she turned and beheld Madeline—in other words, a tall, lovely young lady, wearing a yellow evening dress, with diamond buttons, diamonds in her hair, and carrying a huge painted fan in her exquisitely gloved hands. No pen could convey any idea of her amazement, no brush seize the expression of her countenance, as she staggered back against the nearest desk, with limp arms, protruding eyes, and open mouth, which presently uttered, in a loud and startled key, the one word "Laws!"

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CHAPTER XXIV

AN UNEXPECTED HONOR

A DAPPER man-servant (hired) next came upon the scene, and his astonishment was no less profound, though more skillfully concealed. He looked politely at Madeline, and said in his most proper and parrot-like tone of voice, "Who shall I say, ma'am?"

"Say," returned the young lady, giving her fringe a little pat, her chiffon frill a little twitch, and smiling slightly all the time, "say Miss West."

"Miss West!" bawled the waiter, flinging the door open with a violence that nearly tore it from its ancient hinges, and then stood back, eager to witness the effect of his announcement on the company.

Madeline was scarcely less surprised than they were. She beheld a round table, decorated with flowers, wax candles, and colored shades—really, a most civilized-looking little table—the room well lighted up, its shabbiness concealed by the tender rose-colored light, looking quite venerable and respectable, and, seated at table, Laurence

and two other men—one of whom she knew! Horror! This was a great deal more than she had bargained for. She had never dreamed of dropping in thus upon a cozy little bachelor party!

And who shall paint their amazement? They were talking away, just between the soup and fish, and Wynne had been regretting the absence through illness of Mr. Jessop, whose vacant place awaited him. There had been a little professional discussion, an allusion to a big race, a society scandal, a commendation of some excellent dry sherry, and they were all most genial and comfortable, when the door was flung wide open, and "Miss West" was announced in a stentorian voice.

And who the deuce was Miss West? thought the two guests. All looked up and beheld a lady—a young lady—in full evening dress, and literally blazing with diamonds, standing rather doubtfully just within the doorway. Laurence Wynne felt as if he was turned to stone.

"*Madeline!*" he ejaculated under his breath. Madeline, looking like a fairy princess—but surely Madeline gone mad?

What could he say—what could he do? He might cut the Gordian knot by explaining, "Gentlemen, this beautiful girl, who has dropped, as it were, from the skies, is Mrs. Wynne—my wife"—if she had not heralded her entrance by her maiden name. He might have done this, but now, as matters stood, his lips were sealed. He must take some step immedi-

ately. His friends and the waiter were staring at him expectantly. They evidently thought that there had been a mistake.

"Miss West!" he said, suddenly pushing back his chair and rising. "This is, indeed, an unexpected honor. What can I do for you? There is nothing wrong at—at home, I hope?" now approaching her, and shaking hands.

"No, no," trying to speak calmly, and casting wildly about for some plausible excuse. "I thought I should have found you alone." Then, coloring violently, "I—I mean disengaged, and I wished to consult you on some—some family business."

"If you will honor me by taking a seat at table, and partaking of our—er—bachelor fare, Miss West, I shall be entirely at your service afterward," he said, conducting her to a vacant place opposite his own. "May I introduce my friend Mr. Treherne"—(Mr. Treherne had seen her on the stairs, and hugged himself as he noted the fact)—"and Mr. Fitzherbert?"

"I think Miss West and I have met before," said Mr. Fitzherbert, smiling and bowing as he rose simultaneously with Mr. Treherne, and then subsided into his chair. This was nuts. The beautiful Miss West coming quite on the sly to Wynne's chambers—and Wynne such a staid and proper Johnnie, too!—and finding, to her horror, company! It was altogether most peculiar.

However, Mr. Fitzherbert had his wits about him, and was full of society small-talk and pres-

ence of mind, and soon he and the lady were conversing vivaciously of mutual friends, and the awkward edge of this extraordinary incident had been blunted.

Soup was brought back for Miss West. The waiter waited as a waiter should wait. The dinner was well chosen and excellent (supplied from a neighboring restaurant).

Meanwhile, the good laundress watched the whole proceedings with her eye glued to a crack in the door, and suffered no look or gesture to escape her. She owed this to the whole of her acquaintance, for surely such a sight as she enjoyed was rarely seen. Three young bachelors, in evening dress, sitting by themselves so nice and proper, and then a grand young lady, in a beautiful dress and jewels, walking in unasked, and taking a place among them! What could it mean? It was surely not the thing for a lady—and she looked that—to be coming alone, and on foot, to chambers in the Temple, and especially to see Mr. Wynne, of all the quiet, reasonable-like men, who never looked at a woman! Oh, it beat all, that it did! And how grave he seemed, though he was talking away pleasant enough.

Thus we leave her, with her eye to the door, thoroughly enjoying herself for once in her life.

It was more than could be said for Laurence Wynne. Never had he felt so uncomfortable. What would Fitzherbert and Treherne think of Miss West? If the story got round the clubs, Madeline's reputation was at the mercy of every old woman—ay, and old man—in London.

What on earth did she mean by descending on him at this hour, and dressed as if she was going to the opera?

He stole a glance across the candle-shades. She was conversing quite at her ease with Mr. Treherne, who was looking all the admiration he no doubt felt—and no doubt Madeline was beautiful.

What a complexion, what eyes, what clean-cut features, what a radiant, vivacious expression—and all set off by youth, a good milliner, and diamonds.

"Who would dream," he said, as he slowly withdrew his gaze, "that she was the same Madeline who, two years previously, had been Miss Selina's slave, and had attracted his notice and commiseration in her darned and shabby black gown? or that she was the same Madeline who had pawned the very dress off her back not twelve months ago? She could not be the same." He looked at her again. The idea of such a thing was grotesque nonsense. She, this brilliant being who had suddenly presented herself at his humble entertainment, had surely never been his hard-working, poverty-stricken, struggling wife. If she *had*, he could not realize the fact. This magnificent-looking young lady was a stranger to him. This was a woman—or girl—of the world.

There she sat, this charming, unchaperoned young person, dining with three bachelors in the Temple with as much *sangfroid* as if it were a most conventional and everyday occurrence.

The truth was that, the first shock recovered, the fair guest was actually enjoying herself extremely. She was extraordinarily adaptable. For one thing, she liked the *risque*, unusual situation—her two amusing, clever, mystified supporters on either hand, who were doing their utmost to take it all as a matter of course, and to be unusually agreeable and entertaining. And she liked looking across the table at her husband's handsome, gloomy face, and remarked to herself that this was positively their first dinner-party, and that it should not be her fault if it did not go off well!

Laurence's silence and gravity implied that it was all very wrong; but it was, nevertheless, delightful. She felt quite carried out of herself with excitement and high spirits, and more than once the idea flashed across her mind—

"Shall I tell—shall I tell? Oh, it would be worth anything to see their faces when they hear that I am Mrs. Wynne!"

But Mrs. Wynne was not very good at telling, as we know, and, without any exhausting effort of self-restraint, she was enabled to hold her peace.

CHAPTER XXV

PLAIN SPEAKING

ALL went merry as a marriage bell. The dinner was a success. There was no hitch; the laundress (with interludes devoted to the crack in the door) safely brought up course after course. Now they had ceased, and the company were discussing dessert, and many of the topics of last season—Henley, Ascot, Mrs. Pat Campbell, the rival charms of Hurlingham and Ranelagh.

"Wynne here never goes to these frivolous places," said Treherne.

"I'm not a member, you see."

"'Can't afford it,' that's his cry to all these delights. He can afford it well—a single man, no claims on his purse, and getting such fees."

"Fees, indeed! How long have I been getting a fee at all?" he asked good-humoredly.

"There's Milton, who has not half your screw—keeps his hunters."

"Ah, but he has a private income. I'm a poor man."

"You old miser! You don't even know the meaning of the word 'poverty.' How do you define it?"

"In the words of the plebeian philosopher, 'It ain't no crime—only an infernal ill-convenience.'"

"Well, I shouldn't think it had ever ill-convenienced you much—eh, Miss West?"

Miss West—born actress—made a gesture of airy negation, and, turning quicky to Mr. Fitzherbert, asked him "if he remembered Mrs. Veryphast last season, and her extraordinary costumes. She quite gloried in her shame, and liked to know that every eye was fixed upon her. She had one awful gown—pale yellow, with enormous spots. She reminded me of a Noah's-ark dog. It was her Sunday frock; but it was not as bad as her hat, which was like an animated lobster salad—claws and all."

Then Mr. Fitzherbert had his turn, and told several anecdotes that had already seen some service, but which made Miss West laugh with charming unrestraint. Presently it occurred to the two gentlemen guests that the lady had come for an audience, that it was nearly nine o'clock, and, making one or more lame excuses, which, however, were very readily accepted, they rose reluctantly, and, taking a deferential leave of Miss West, with a "By-by, old chappie," to their host, effected their exit, leaving—had they but known it—Mr. and Mrs. Wynne *téte-a-téte*, alone.

"Well, Laurence," exclaimed Madeline, with her usual smiling and *insouciant* air, rising slowly, coming to the fire, and spreading her hands to the blaze.

"Well, Madeline," he echoed, following her, laying his arm on the mantel-piece, and looking as severe as if he were going to cross-examine a witness. "What does this mean? Have you gone mad, or have you come to stay?"

"Not I," she replied coolly, now putting an extremely neat little shoe upon the fender. "Papa is away, and won't be back until late, and I took it into my head that I would come over and dine with you, and give you an agreeable surprise; but"—with a laugh—"seemingly it has been a surprise only; the word 'agreeable' we may leave out."

"You may," he said roughly. "I wonder you have not more sense! If you had sent me a wire that you were coming—if you had even had yourself ushered in under your lawful name; but to come masquerading here as Miss West is—is too much, and I tell you plainly, Madeline, that I won't have it. What must those fellows have thought of you to-night? Fitzherbert will blazon it all over London. Have you no regard for your reputation—your good name?"

"There, there, Laurence, my dear," raising her hands with a gesture of graceful deprecation, "that is lecturing enough—that will do!"

"But it won't do," he repeated angrily. "I really believe that you are beginning to think of me as a miserable, weak-minded idiot, who will stand anything. There's not another man in England would have stood as much as I have done, and, by George! I've had enough of it,"

with a wave of his hand in his turn. "This visit of yours is the last straw. If you have no regard for Miss West's reputation, be good enough to think of *mine*. I do not choose to have gayly dressed young women coming flaunting to my humble chambers at any hour of the day. I've been hitherto considered rather a steady, respectable sort of fellow; I wonder what people will think of me now? Your visit will be all over the Inns to-morrow, and half my circuit will be clamoring to know 'who my friend was?' "

"Nonsense, Laurence! What an old-fashioned frump you are! Girls do all sorts of things nowadays, and no one minds. It is the fashion to be emancipated. Why, the two De Minxskys go and dine with men, and do a theater afterward! Chaperons are utterly exploded! And look at girls over in America "

"We are not in America, but London, where people ask for explanations."

"Well, you can easily explain *me* away! You must be a very bad lawyer if you are not equal to such a trifling occasion as this! Oh, my dear Laurence," beginning to laugh at the mere recollection, "I wish you could have seen your own face when I walked in—a study in sepia, a nocturne in black. Come, now, you can tell your anxious friends that I'm a client, and they will be *so* envious; or that I'm your step-sister, a sister-in-law, or any little fib you fancy. And as you so seldom have the pleasure of my society, make much of me"—drawing forward

a chair, and seating herself—"and tell that old woman of yours to bring me a cup of coffee." There was nothing like taking high ground.

"Yes, presently; but before that there is something that I wish to say to you," also taking a seat. "We won't have any more of this shilly-shallying, Madeline. You will have to make your choice *now*—to be either Miss West or Mrs. Wynne, permanently and publicly."

A pause, during which a cinder fell out of the grate, and the clock ticked sixty seconds. Then Madeline, who would not have believed, she told herself, that Laurence could be so shockingly bearish, plucked up spirit and said:

"I will be both for the present! And soon I will be Mrs. Wynne only. Papa is not well now —worried, and very cross. I began to try and tell him only two nights ago, and his very look paralyzed me. I must have a little more time. As it is, I think, between my visits to the Holt farm and here, I play my two parts extremely well!"

"Then you must permit me to differ with you," said her husband, in a frosty voice. "The part of wife, as played for many months, has certainly been a farce; but, to put the case in a mild form, it has not been a success. As to your role of mother, the less said the better."

"Laurence"—aghast, and drawing in her breath—"how can you speak to me in that way? It is not like you!"

"How do you know what I am like *now?* People change. And since *you* are so much

changed, you need not be astonished if I am changed, too!"

"And oh, Laurence, I am so—so angry with you about one thing!" she exclaimed irrelevantly. "I went to the Holts' on Tuesday and saw Harry; he looks a perfect little angel!"

"Is that why you are so angry?"

"Nonsense! Why did you tell Mrs. Holt to refuse my money? Why may I not pay for him?"

"Because it is not your affair, but mine."

"Not my affair?" she repeated incredulously.

"No; it is my business to maintain my son. And I shall certainly not suffer him to be paid for by Mr. West's money!"

"It is mine; he gives it to me for my own use."

"No doubt—to expend in dress and such things. Not for the support of his unknown grandchild. You would be taking his money under false pretenses. Your father pays for his daughter's expenses; I pay for my son's expenses."

"And I may not?"

"No." He shook his head curtly.

"But I am his mother!" she said excitedly.

"I thought you had forgotten that! Now, look here, Maddie, I am not going to be put off with words any longer! You cannot run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. You must come home at once. Tell your father the truth, or let *me* tell him the truth, and make your choice once for all. This double life, where all of it is spent in one sphere, and only the shadow falls on the other, won't do. Think of your

child" — with rising heat — "growing up a stranger to you! Poor chap! he believes that Mrs. Holt is his mother. I—I try and see him; but what good am I? I'm only a man, and not much of a hand with small children. Madeline, this cursed money has poisoned your mind! Admiration has turned your head. You are no more what you once were—"

"Don't say it, Laurence!" she cried, springing up and laying her hand on his mouth. "I have been waiting, waiting, waiting, trying to bring my courage to the sticking-point, and hoping to bring you and my father quietly together. I see I have been wrong. I—I will tell him to-morrow—yes, there is my hand on it; and if he turns me out, as is most probable, I shall be sitting here making your tea to-morrow evening! You believe me, Laurence?" standing over him as he leaned his head in his hand, and looked into the fire.

"There have been so many to-morrows, Maddie. I'm like the man in the fable about the boy and the wolves; but"—suddenly pulling himself together, and confronting her—"I will believe that this time it really *is* wolf." Standing up and looking at her, he added, "I will believe you, and trust you. And now"—ringing the bell as he spoke—"you shall have your coffee, and I am going to take you home in a hansom."

"Home! It's too early yet—ten past nine. Take me to the theater for an hour. Take me to the Haymarket; it will be such fun!"

"Fun!" he echoed, impatiently. "Supposing

any one was to see you—any of your friends—what would they think? They do not know that I am your husband; they would only take me for some admirer, who, presuming on your father's absence, had escorted you to the theater, under the rose—that would be capital fun!"

"What harm would it be? I like puzzling people. I like to give them something to talk about," she answered recklessly.

"And I do not. And I suppose I know a little more of the world than you do. You seem to think it would be a joke to fling down your good name, and allow it to be destroyed from pure wantonness, but I shall not permit it."

"Laurence, how you do talk! One would think you were addressing a jury, or were some old fogey laying down the law!"

"I am laying down the law."

"You must please remember that I am accustomed to be spoiled. Now, *my* wishes are law in Belgrave Square, and you are going to carry them out, and take me to see 'The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith?'"

"Take care that you do not become the notorious Miss West."

"Now, Laurence, you know you cannot really say no to me. Oh!"—with a slight start—"here comes the coffee at last!" as the laundress, who insisted upon doing this little errand in person, in order to have what she called "a rare good look," fumbled at the door, pushed it open with her knee, and marched in, carrying a small tray, which she laid very slowly on the table, her eyes

all the while being fixed on the beautiful vision standing by the fire.

She had her face turned away; but Mr. Wynne, who was leaning his head on his hand, and his elbow on the mantel-piece, confronted her steadily and said, in a less cordial tone than usual, "There, Mrs. Potts, that will do! You need not wait. Call a hansom as soon as you go downstairs," and Mrs. Potts very reluctantly shuffled out. She had seen a good deal, but was as much at sea as ever.

The young woman had her hand on Mr. Wynne's arm when she went in, and was saying, "You know you cannot say 'no' to *me*, and are going to take me to the theater." Was ever such a brazen piece! He had his head turned away, and looked as if he'd rather have her room than her company. The girls run after the men now, and no mistake! It was scandalous! The haystack after the cow! Supposing this young person's folk were to know of her carryings on—and with Mr. Wynne, of all men! It beat everything that Mrs. Potts had come across right away into a cocked hat!

A few minutes later they were coming down the stairs, miss all wrapped up in a long velvet cloak, which velvet cloak Mrs. Potts having found in the outer office, had done herself the pleasure of examining, and—low be it spoken—trying on. None of your "paletot things," as she expressed it, but a long mantle of crimson velvet, reaching down to the floor, trimmed with thick, soft fur, and lined with satin, smelling

powerfully of some sweet perfume—violets. Mrs. Potts, being squat and of short stature, was lost in it. But the time when she was enveloped in a six-hundred-pound wrap was indisputably one of her happiest moments. There was a pocket inside, and in that pocket a dainty lace-edged handkerchief, which, I am sorry to say, Mrs. Potts felt called upon to confiscate as a souvenir.

It did not appear to be one of Mr. Wynne's happiest moments, as he pulled on his greatcoat, and followed the daintily tripping, high-heeled steps of his visitor downstairs.

Mrs. Potts, who had naturally hung about the door below, did herself the honor of seeing the couple into the hansom, and heard the order—"Haymarket Theater."

"So she had got her way," said the charwoman, as she stood boldly in the doorway and looked after them. Then she went upstairs to Mr. Wynne's room and finished the sherry, poured herself out a cup of coffee, which she sipped at her leisure, as she sat comfortably over the fire in Mr. Wynne's own chair. One-half of the world certainly does not know how the other half lives!

"Really, it is very ridiculous of you to be so strait-laced and grumpy, Laurence," said his wife. "Think of all I am going to relinquish for your sake!"—touching her furs. "This mantle, which makes other women green with envy, cost nearly six hundred pounds!"

"Six hundred fiddlesticks!" he echoed incredulously.

"You can see the bill if you like."

"You ought to be ashamed to wear it, Maddie!"

"Not at all, my dear. It is for the good of trade. If some people did not buy and wear fine feathers what would become of trade?"

"Six hundred pounds! More than he could earn in twelve months! And she paid that for an opera-cloak!"

"You really must make yourself agreeable, Laurence. This may be the last time I shall play the fairy princess, before I go back to my rags. No, no, I don't mean that."

"Something tells me, all the same, that this will not be your last appearance in your present character. Not that I question for a moment your good intentions, Maddie, or disbelieve your word. But I have a presentiment—a sort of depressing sensation that I cannot account for—that, far from your returning home to-morrow, our lives will somehow have drifted further apart than ever."

"Fancy a clever man like you, dear, believing in such foolish things as presentiments! They are merely remnants of the dark ages. I hope we shall be able to get a box," she added, as they drew up at the theater, "no matter how tiny; a stall would be too conspicuous."

The Wynnes were late. The orchestra was playing during an interval, and they had the great good luck to secure a box overlooking the stage.

Madeline removed her mantle, and, taking a seat with her back to the house, having glanced

round with affected nervousness, said to her companion, in a smothered whisper:

"Sister Ann, Sister Ann! do you see anybody looking? Do you think any one recognized me by my back hair?"

Laurence had noted several familiar faces; and one man in an opposite box had recognized him. But this was of no importance, as he could not possibly identify Madeline.

Madeline whispered and laughed and chattered to him behind her fan. He told himself that he was a sour, sulky brute to be so gruff and irresponsive to the beautiful girl opposite to him, although he could hardly realize that she was his wife as he glanced at her at this special moment, as she sat with her head resting on her hand, diamonds glittering on her gown and in her hair, a gay smile on her lips, no wedding-ring on her finger. Could this really be Madeline West, Mrs. Harper's pupil-teacher, and his wife?

His acquaintance in the opposite box was astonished to see Wynne over against him. Surely it was not to another man that he was thus bending forward and stooping his head so politely, as if to lose nothing of what was being told him! Ah, no—he thought not! as presently a very pretty hand, wrist, and arm emerged from the shadow of the curtain, and lay upon the velvet cushion.

He snatched up his excellent opera-glass, and noted a sparkling bracelet and diamond rings. But no—there was not a wedding-ring among them!

CHAPTER XXVI

MR. WYNNE MAKES A STATEMENT

WHEN the play was over the Wynnes prudently waited, and were almost the last to leave. But, even so, when they passed through the lobbies, a good many people were still to be seen. They were a rather remarkable couple, and although Madeline had drawn her lace scarf well over her head, it was of no avail. On the stairs she came face to face with Lord Tony.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, as he accosted her. "I did not know you were coming here to-night. Rachel told me she lunched with you to-day, and you were alone in your glory. Whom did you come with?" And he looked as if he was expecting to see some of the party.

"I came in very good company," she replied. "But, pray, who made *you* my father confessor?"

"I only wish I was! Are you going on to supper at the Candytufts? If so, we shall meet again."

"No, I'm going home this moment."

"How virtuous! Well, you'll be in the Row to-morrow—riding—at the usual hour?"

"I'm not sure."

"I'll look out for you about ten. Good-night." And he hurried off.

"Who is that?" inquired Laurence.

"Oh, a great friend of papa's—Lord Anthony Foster."

"Indeed! I shouldn't have thought they had many tastes in common."

"Well, at any rate they have *one*," she answered, with a flippant laugh.

"Yes, dense as I am, I think I can guess it!"

Mr. Wynne was also recognized by several of his own friends. Why is it that there is always some one to see you when you wish to escape notice, and, when you particularly desire to court observation, there is never any one forthcoming?

No; and yet if you lose a front tooth, and, with a gaping chasm in your neat front row, are en route to the dentist, you are bound to encounter half your acquaintances.

Mr. Fitzherbert and Mr. Treherne were standing on the steps as their friend passed, and wished him a cheerful good-night.

He did not accompany Madeline; she would not permit it. She must get home at once, before her father returned, she whispered; "and supposing she were seen driving up, escorted by a gentleman, a stranger!"

"All right, all right, Maddie," wringing her hand. "But, mind you, it is the last time. Remember, to-morrow! Send me a wire, and I shall come and fetch you."

Then, with a gesture of farewell, he stepped back, and she was quickly whirled away.

Mr. Fitzherbert and Mr. Treherne were still endeavoring to light up, and had not yet started to walk; the night was fine and frosty, and they had not far to go.

"I'm coming your way. Hold on a minute till I get out my cigar-case," said their late host. And soon the trio were facing homeward, discussing the piece, the actresses, the audience; but not a word dropped from either gentleman's lips with regard to Wynne's mysterious lady friend, though, like the celebrated parrot, they thought the more. Wynne was a reserved sort of chap. For nearly a year he had dropped out of their ken. Jessop alone was his confidential friend. None ever dreamed of poking their noses into his affairs, as a caustic reply or a painful snub was sure to be the reward of the experiment. He was of good family—that they knew; and latterly some of his influential relations had been looking him up. (Nothing succeeds like success, and the brilliant author of society skits was now eagerly claimed by his connections.)

Nevertheless, they were exceedingly anxious to know more respecting Miss West, the gay, vivacious beauty, whose fame had spread far and wide, whose riches and whose disheartening indifference to the advances of the most eligible *partis* were alike proverbial.

What on earth had she to do with a hard-working barrister like Wynne, who rarely mixed in society? They asked each other this question after they had left Wynne and his client tête-á-tête. "Business?"

It was confoundedly odd that she should pitch on such an hour, and on such an uncommonly handsome fellow as Wynne for her legal adviser; and the funniest part of it all was, that Wynne was not particularly pleased to see her, and treated her as coolly as if she had been his grand-aunt by marriage! Talking of matters far different from their inmost thoughts brought the trio to Mr. Treherne's chambers.

"Come up, you fellows, and have some deviled bones," he said hospitably; "the night is young!"

Mr. Fitzherbert never turned a deaf ear to such an appeal, but Wynne on this occasion, rather to his friend's surprise, said, "All right, I'll come up for a minute," and sprang up the stairs two steps at a time.

"I'm not going to stay," he said, taking off his hat and standing with his back to the fire, still in his topcoat; "but I've just wished to have a word with you two fellows. I want to ask you, as a special favor to *me*, to say nothing to any one of having met Miss West in my chambers."

The two guests muttered, "Oh, of course not; certainly not;" but without any great alacrity. This demand was decidedly a blow, for they were only human, and were looking forward to describing the scene with pleasurable anticipation.

"When I ask you to do me this favor," he resumed, as coolly as if he were speaking in court, "I think it only fair to take you into my confidence, and to tell you our secret. Miss West and

I were married nearly two years ago. *She is my wife.*"

And putting on his hat, he nodded good-night with the utmost *sangfroid*, and ere they could get out one single syllable, much less question, he was already at the bottom of the last flight of stairs.

CHAPTER XXVII

A PROMISE POSTPONED

"A TELEGRAM for you, sir," said one of the clerks to Laurence Wynne, the following morning. Telegrams were a common arrival; but instinctively he felt that there was something unusual about this one, as he tore it open and glanced over it.

"My father is dangerously ill. Impossible to fulfill promise. Writing."

"I knew it," he said, as he crumpled the paper in his hand, then smoothed it and read it over again. "No," to the clerk, who had a bet on an imminent big race, and had gathered alarm from Mr. Wynne's expression, "no, Stevens; there is no answer."

. . . . . .

"Mr. West had come in and gone to bed," so Miss West was impressively informed by the butler. Yes, he had inquired for her, and he had told him that, to the best of his belief, she was spending the evening with Lady Rachel.

Madeline breathed again freely, and hurried up to her own room, almost afraid of encountering her fussy and inquisitive parent on the stairs, and being rigidly questioned then and there.

But Mr. West had not been feeling well, and complained of his chest and breathing, and had gone straight to bed, so said Josephine. Consequently there was no chance of his loitering about in passages, awaiting her, and catching cold.

Madeline sat over her fire, for a long time, wondering how she could bring herself to tell him, and what would be the result of her great piece of news. It must be told—and told to-morrow; Laurence was evidently serious. She had not known till now that Laurence could be hard, stern, and immovable. Well—well—she wished the ordeal was over, and well over; this time to-morrow it would be a thing of the past.

"Perhaps, nay, most likely," she said to herself half aloud, "this is the very last time I shall sit at this fire; the last time I shall have a maid to lay out my things and brush my hair. Heigho! I wish—no—no—I don't wish I had not married Laurence, but there is no harm in wishing that he was *rich!*"

Madeline's terror of her inevitable interview kept her awake for hours; her heart beat so loudly that it would not suffer her to sleep, and it was really morning when she fell into a troubled doze, from which she was aroused by Josephine with an unusually long face, and no morning tea in her hand.

"Mademoiselle," she said, "your father is very ill, so his man says. The doctor has been sent for. They think he has got inflammation of the lungs."

Madeline sprang out of bed, huddled on some clothes, and went at once to her parent's room. He was very ill—in high fever, his breath coming in quick laboring gasps. It was, as Josephine had said, inflammation of the lungs, and the doctor added, "a very sharp attack." It had come to a crisis with extraordinary rapidity. It was, he admitted, a grave case; he would like another opinion, and two hospital nurses must be procured at once. How quickly every alleviation, every possible remedy for sickness, every luxury, flows into a rich man's sick-room!

Was he dangerously ill? asked Madeline, with bated breath.

"Well, there was always a danger in these sudden attacks, and Mr. West had lived a hard life and taken an immensity of wear and tear out of his nerves and vitality. His heart was weak; but still, he had pulled people through worse cases, and she must not think that because her father was seriously ill he was bound to—to—" and he left her to fill in the blank herself, not wishing to hint at that ugly word—death.

And thus was Madeline's confession postponed *sine die*, and Madeline felt that she had been reprieved. Yes, the personal fascination of Laurence's presence had already faded. She wrote a long affectionate letter, and explained the state of the case to Laurence, and sent him constant

bulletins of her father's progress, and except for one flying visit to the Holt Farm and once to church on Sundays, she never left the house for the whole month of November. However, she was cheered in her monotonous duties by the company of Mrs. Leach, who, on hearing of dear Mr. West's illness, had written from Brighton and volunteered her services to her darling Madeline. Then she had arrived in person and urged her request with persistence. She would look after the house, see callers, write notes, and leave Madeline unlimited time to spend with the dear invalid.

At first Mr. West, fretful and weary, would not hear of her arrangement. It was one thing to look into the fair widow's eyes and hold her hand and listen to her flatteries, when in good health, on an idle autumn day; it was another to have her coming and quartering herself thus on a sick house. However, after many messages and intrigues and excuses, Madeline gave way. She was weak, the besieger was strong, and she begged her father to accept the proffered favor.

"I cannot get rid of her, dear. She is determined to come, and, after all, *you* won't see her, you know." But here she reckoned without her guest.

In less than a week Mrs. Leach was frequently smoothing the sick man's pillow. She paid him a little visit daily, to which he actually looked forward. She told him all the latest news, she flattered him, and she made an agreeable object

in the sick-room, with her charming gowns and handsome face.

After all, she took no part in the management of the house, nor did she see visitors, or write notes. She was (she said) so stupid about domestic matters. It seemed to Madeline that their prearranged roles were exchanged; she kept to her usual duties as housekeeper and mistress of the establishment, and Mrs. Leach gave more and more of her time to the sick-room. She had a pleasant voice which never tired, and read aloud to the invalid for hours. She made him his afternoon tea with her own fair hands, and always took a cup with him. Indeed Mrs. Leach cruelly maligned herself when she called herself stupid; on the contrary, she was an excessively clever woman, twice as worldly-wise as her pretty Madeline. In her heart of hearts, she had determined to be Madeline's stepmother; but Madeline must marry, she would prefer the house to herself, and she looked round the gorgeous yellow drawing-room with the air of a proprietor, and indeed had already mentally altered the arrangement of the furniture! Why did not Madeline accept one of the gilded youths who fluttered round her? There was some story in Madeline's past, and if she could not steal the key to her skeleton cupboard, she was determined to pick the lock, for she had had a glimpse through the keyhole—and there *was* something inside! This glimpse had been afforded her by means of a young lady who had stayed at the same hotel at Harrowgate, a Miss De Ville, who had been

for several years at the same school as the lovely Miss West. Crafty Mrs. Leach affected a very faint acquaintance with Miss West but a very warm interest in Miss De Ville and her school days, and even went so far as to ask her in to tea in her own little sitting-room, and showed her the photographs of her cousins, the Countess of Cabinteely and the Honorable Mrs. Greene-Pease.

"And so you were at school with Madeline West, the Australian heiress?" she said.

"Yes, for several years; the last year and a half she was a pauper—a pupil-teacher who received no pay—and I do believe wore Miss Selina's old shoes."

"How extraordinary!"

"Yes; her father never paid for her, though for years before he had paid very highly. She learned everything, even swimming and riding, and had most lovely clothes. Then he disappeared. However, he has bobbed up again with quantities of money, by all accounts—*at present.*"

"And when he came home was he not ashamed of himself? What excuse had he when he found his daughter in such a condition?" demanded Mrs. Leach.

"I don't know; he *did* find her there. But this is the funny thing: she had been sent away in *disgrace*, so it was whispered, one Christmas holidays, and was absent for a good while."

Mrs. Leach opened her great dark eyes and exclaimed, "Good gracious! Where was she? What had she done?"

"Well, it happened in the holidays, you see, and just afterward there was a great piece of fuss about Miss Selina's marriage and quarrel with Mrs. Harper, so that put the thing aside; but we did hear through the servants," and here she had the grace to redden, "that Miss West had run away from school."

"And was that all?"

"Well, Mrs. Leach, don't you think it a good deal?"

"Of course, of course!" impatiently, "shocking, abominable! But were there no details and no particulars — no reason given for her escapade?"

"No; and Mrs. Harper and Miss Letitia, when I asked them plump out one day, when I was staying in the neighborhood and was having supper with them, denied it most emphatically. They were quite *angry*."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Leach, with a gasp of disappointment. "Hushed it up for the credit of the school, eh?"

"No, they said Miss Selina had made dreadful mischief, and been the cause of Madeline being sent away for a little time; but we have never heard Miss Selina's version of the story," she added expressively.

"Where is *she* now?"

"Oh, she married a clergyman much younger than herself, and has gone to the South Sea Islands."

"Yes, well out of the way. And are you intimate with Miss West?"

"No; we had a quarrel the last year she was at school with me and did not speak for months."

"What was it about?"

"Oh, something trivial, hairpins, I think, or not passing the butter; but I never really liked her. Still, for old times' sake, I have sometimes thought of calling. My aunt, Lady MacWeasle, knows her, and says the Wests give magnificent entertainments and go everywhere."

"Yes?"

"I've seen her driving in the Park, beautifully dressed; but I am sure she is painted. Perhaps some day I shall call, or rather get my aunt to take me."

"Well, dear, there is the first dressing-bell, so I must send you away. Good-by, for the present. I have enjoyed this little chat *so* much, you have such a way of interesting one." And really, for once, Mrs. Leach was speaking the pure and unadulterated truth.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

A PORTIERE WHICH INTERVENED

Mr. West was ably nursed, he was wiry, and he struggled back to a most trying, peevish convalescence, greatly hastened by Mrs. Leach's assiduous attentions; and early in January he was ordered off to the Riviera without delay. He was to go to Nice, and, of course, he was not to go alone. Madeline would accompany him. What would Laurence say to this?

In her father's present precarious state of health, she dared not tell him her news, it would be too great a shock; and yet she almost dreaded facing her husband with another excuse.

Laurence was not to be trifled with, still less her father. What an unlucky creature she was! she said to herself tearfully.

Between these two men, who had such claims upon her, what was she to do? Which was to be sacrificed, father or husband? And then there was little Harry.

And yet her father clung to her as tenaciously as if he were a child, and could scarcely endure her out of his sight.

Circumstances put tremendous pressure upon her, circumstances in the shape of doctors, her father, and her fears; and she allowed herself, as usual, to drift.

It was quite settled that she was to go to Nice —in fact there had never been any question of her remaining behind—and to stay there until May. She had no alternative in the character of Miss West, go she must; but in her character of Mrs. Wynne, how was she to act? What about her husband and son?

She dared not again venture a visit to the Temple, so she wrote a very loving, pleading little letter, putting everything before Laurence in the best and strongest light, as seen from her own point of view, and imploring him to be patient just a little longer until her father was well enough to bear the shock—and to live without her. To this letter she received no reply for ten days.

Then Mr. Jessop called, he was an occasional visitor at Belgrave Square. He felt a certain cynical pleasure in watching both "hands" in this curious game. It was ten times more interesting than the best novel going, or even the latest society play, so he told himself. To see little—no, she was not little, but young—Mrs. Wynne once, and to see her as she was now, was indeed a most startling contrast. To see Laurence working away like a horse in a mill, was another fine sight. And to behold a couple, once so devoted, so absolutely indifferent to one another, so totally divided by that

great gulf, wealth, was the strangest spectacle of all!

Mr. Jessop occasionally dropped in on a Sunday afternoon, and paid his respects to Miss West and her father. A short time before their departure for the sunny South, he called to take leave and wish them "bon voyage." It was one gloomy January afternoon. Mr. West was not visible, but Miss West received him and various other visitors in a snug, warm little drawing-room, one of a suite where she dispensed small talk, smiles, and afternoon tea. Mr. Jessop sat out all the other visitors with imperturbable resolution, and when the last had risen and departed, he brought his chair nearer to the fire unasked, crossed his long legs, stuck his glass in his eye, and, after a momentary pause, said:

"And how does Laurence look upon this little expedition of yours?"

"He has not answered my letter; but, you know, silence gives consent," was the smiling response. "Are you surprised?" and she awaited his verdict with smiling, upraised eyes.

"Well, frankly, I am."

"You, under similar circumstances, would not be so complacent?"

"No; I should probably be up before the 'beak' for wife-beating."

"Mr. Jessop!"

"Mrs. Wynne!"

"Hu-s-sh!' with a quick gesture of dismay.

"Well, I will 'hu-s-sh!' as you wish it; but it

will be shouted on the housetops some day. How you have kept the secret for so long amazes me; even Wynne's old friends don't know of your existence. His own distant relations have actually reinstated him. They believe that he made a fool of himself with a penniless shop-girl or teacher, and is now a *not* disconsolate widower!"

This was a very nasty speech; but Mr. Jessop was in a bad humor. When he looked round this luxurious abode, and had seen Mrs. Wynne receiving homage and dispensing favors among a little court, and then recalled his old schoolfellow's quarters, his ascetic life, his laborious days—his heart became hot within him.

"Why do you say such horrid things?" she asked petulantly.

"When did you see Laurence last?"

"I've not seen him for ages—centuries! Not since I dined with him in his chambers. I walked in and found him entertaining two men. Oh, I wish I could draw their faces!"

"I wish you could! I heard of that. You gave the staircase something to talk about. Laurence is on circuit now. I dined with him a couple of weeks ago. He is working very hard—too hard; but he won't mind any one. I must say you are a pretty pair!"

"Thank you; it is not often that *you* pay me a compliment!" she returned, with a bend of her head.

"And Harry?"

"He is very well."

"I must run down and see him when I can, as one of the duties of a godfather."

"Yes; he is growing quite a big boy, and will soon be able to use your knife and fork."

"I'm glad to hear it; but I should have thought he wanted some teeth first!" Then, as a clock chimed, "Hullo! that is half-past six, and I must go; and you are off next week, and go straight through to Nice *wagon de luxe*, and all that sort of thing?"

"Of course," with a slightly defiant smile.

"Have you any message for *him?*"

"No, thank you; I'm afraid you would be an indifferent Mercury. No, I have no message. Good-by."

They shook hands rather limply, and he took leave. As the door closed on Mr. Jessop she gave a long sigh of relief, and was about to reseat herself, when her quick ear caught a sound behind a heavy velvet portière which divided the room from an inner sanctum; it was the sound of the dropping of a small article, such as a bangle or thimble, on the parquet. Prompted by a sudden and inexplicable impulse, she pulled aside the curtain, and Mrs. Leach, with a blotter in her hand and an expression of embarrassment on her face, stood revealed.

"I—I—was writing in there, dear, some urgent notes, and I have dropped my pet pen. It is one I am so fond of. Do help me to look for it, darling."

Mrs. Leach was inclined to *embonpoint* and rather stiff.

"Oh, it is easily found!" said Madeline, picking it up after a moment's search. As she handed it to its owner, who had now advanced to the full light, their eyes met. Madeline read in those uneasy, slyly scanning orbs that their owner had her suspicions, that this smiling widow had been listening behind the portière. Should she tax her or not?

Mrs. Leach was an adept at reading faces. She saw that Madeline distrusted her smooth lies, that Madeline was secretly terrified, that Madeline was eagerly searching her mind as to what she could possibly have heard; that it was a critical moment. Accordingly she made a bold move.

"I know what you think, dear," she said, coming up to the fire and warming one foot—"you think I have been unintentionally eaves-dropping."

She had been eagerly listening, with every nerve strained, for ten whole minutes; but, alas! the portière was very thick, the sounds were muffled, and she had, unfortunately, caught no names. She was certain that she had been in every sense on the threshold of dear Madeline's secret; but, alas! she had not got beyond that; had only caught a word here and there. The word "Hush!" something about "shop-girl," and "a widower"; something about "a staircase," and a "compliment"; something about "a knife and fork," and, lastly, two whole sentences, "How you have kept the secret for so long amazes me!" and "Have you any message for him?"

Whoever this *him* was, he was Miss West's lover, the man whose influence enabled her to turn a deaf ear to every other suitor. Presumably he was not presentable. If Madeline would but marry him, or elope with him, the course would be open to her, she would easily step into her place. The main thing was to lull Madeline's suspicions, to give her plenty of rope; in other words, opportunities for meetings, to pretend to see nothing, yet to allow nothing to escape her vigilance. This man—his name was Jessop — was in Madeline's secret, the secret she had kept so amazingly! If she played her cards properly, she, too, would soon share it!

"I declare I did not hear a single word. I am a little deaf since I had the influenza; so whatever you were talking about is perfectly safe as far as *I* am concerned."

Madeline made no reply, but came and stood before the fire, and her pretty, level brows were knit. She was endeavoring to recall her recent conversation, and as well as she could recollect she had said *nothing* that incriminated her. She breathed more freely. The portière *was* thick—it was wadded; but, all the same, she did not believe her fair companion. Her mouth said smooth things; but her eyes had told tales. Her suspicions were aroused; but she, too, could play a part.

"Of course; no lady ever lends herself to eavesdropping, I know," she said quietly. "Mr. Jessop and I were merely quarreling; we often

quarrel. He has a knack of rubbing people up the wrong way."

"Oh, Mr. Jessop! is *that* his name? He is a most cynical, disagreeable-looking man. When did you first meet him, dear?"

"He called on me." She did not add where—viz., in Solferino Place. "He is rather amusing when he is in a good humor."

"What is he?"

"A barrister; a clever, idle barrister."

"Oh, is he a barrister? Do you know, I rather like them. I wonder if he would take us over one of the inns, and to see the Law Courts and Temple? Wouldn't you like to see it, some day?"

"No. I don't think I should care much about it," rejoined Madeline with studied indifference.

Could—oh, could Mrs. Leach have guessed anything? At any rate, she was getting *hot*, as they say in magic music; and, to put an end to such hazardous conversation, she went over to the piano and began to play a little thing of Grieg's. Now that she suspected Mrs. Leach, handsome, well-mannered, charming, low-voiced Mrs. Leach, of wishing to play the spy, her terrified memory recalled many little items which she pieced together: how Mrs. Leach had a careless way of looking over all the letters, of hearing two conversations at the same time, of asking strange and seemingly stupid questions—especially about the last years of her residence at Harperton!

In the early days of Mr. West's convalescence,

when his appearance downstairs and his temper had been somewhat fitful, Madeline found herself one afternoon alone in the library with Lord Tony. He was talking of the theaters, and urging her to accompany him and Lady Rachel to the Haymarket.

"This beastly snow has stopped the hunting, and there is nothing to do but skate and go to the play. Why can't you come to-night? Your father is pretty nearly all right; and Mrs. Leach will look after him. It's a capital piece. Oh, I forgot!" and he paused; he had been walking to and fro, with his hands in his pockets.

"Forgot what?" looking up from her embroidery.

"That you'd seen it before."

"What do you mean?" she asked, gazing at him with dispassionate calm.

"I mean that I saw you there, now I remember; but I didn't see your chaperon! You needn't look so stunned; you were with a good-looking chap, in a stage box. You sat with your back to the audience, too."

"What *are* you talking about?"

"And you appeared to be delighted with the piece; but I thought your friend seemed a little bored. And, don't you remember, I spoke to you in the vestibule? Who was he?"

"Oh, yes! Looked rather bored, did he? Then surely you can *guess* who he was!" now smiling expressively.

"Not"—coming to a standstill—"not your—"

"Hush! Yes."

"Well, I *am* blessed! He is a gentleman, anyway."

"Thank you. I must tell him; he will be *so* pleased."

"I mean that he looks clean-bred; not like—" and he stopped. "Of course I can easily find out who he is; but, honor bright, I won't! I will forbear."

"Then, I'll take pity on your starving curiosity. His name is Wynne."

"What, the writing chap?"

"Yes."

"And you are Mrs. Wynne?"

"I am under that impression."

"He must be a long-suffering sort of fellow, or—"

"Or what?"

"I was going to say something that *might* sound rude."

"Oh, pray don't hesitate on my account! I've often heard you say rude things; and one speech more or less does not signify."

"Yes; and it may serve as a slight antidote to the large doses of flattery you are forced to swallow."

"Come! Or *what?*"

"I was going to say, he does not care a rap about you. It's a little way married men have, particularly in these days of emancipated womankind — especially wives. Does he care, Mrs. Wynne?"

"You want to know too much," she answered, without raising her eyes. "Some day I shall

make you acquainted with one another, and then you can ask him."

"All right, then; I will. I suppose Mrs. Leach is going abroad with you?"

"Oh, dear, no!" she replied, with unusual emphasis.

"Then she is not living here *altogether?*"

"Oh, no! What an absurd idea!"

"She is a handsome woman for her age, although she will never see fifty again."

"I think she will."

"You mean that she will live to a hundred?"

"No. I mean that she is not more than thirty."

"I should be sorry to be hanging since she was fifty!"

"Every woman is the age she looks," said Miss West, sententiously.

"So be it; neither Mrs. Leach's age nor looks concern me. You and she hit it off together pretty well, don't you?"

"Certainly," she answered rather loftily.

"Then that is all right!" in a tone of brisk relief.

"What do you mean?"

"Miss West, excuse me, if I repeat your own recent reply to me, you want to know *too* much."

"If you imply—" she began, but hesitated, for at this instant the door was opened by a footman, and Mr. West entered, leaning on Mrs. Leach's arm, while his valet followed with a supply of papers, rugs, and cushions. They formed quite an interesting procession.

CHAPTER XXIX

"MR. WYNNE!"

A FEW days before their departure for the sunny south, Miss West, her father, and several visitors were sitting in the drawing-room, the tall shaded lamps were lighted, the fragrant five-o'clock cup was being dispensed by Madeline; who was not, as Lady Rachel remarked, in her usual good spirits. Lady Rachel had thrown off her furs, she had secured a comfortable seat in a becoming light, and was flirting audaciously with a congenial spirit. Mrs. Leach was of course present, and an elderly colonel, Mrs. Veryphast (a smart society matron), her sister, and a couple of Guardsmen—quite a gathering. Mrs. Veryphast was laughing uproariously, Mrs. Leach was solemnly comparing notes respecting dressmakers with Mrs. Veryphast's sister. The colonel, Mr. West, and Lord Tony, were discussing the share list. The Guardsmen were devoting themselves to the fair tea maker, when the ante-room door was flung open with a flourish, and a footman announced "Mr. Wynne!"

This name was merely that of an ordinary

visitor--one of the multitude who flocked to offer incense to his daughter, a partner and a slave, in fact, in the ears of every one save two—Lord Tony's, and Mrs. Wynne's. The latter felt as if she had been turned to stone. Had Laurence come to make a scene? to claim her? She breathed hard, living a whole year of anxiety in a few seconds of time. The hand that held the sugar-tongs actually became rigid through fear. She glanced at her father. He, poor innocent individual, was totally unconscious of the crisis, and little supposed that the good-looking young fellow now shaking hands with Madeline was actually his son-in-law!

"Oh, how do you do?" faltered Miss West, and raising a swift, appealing, half-terrified look to the stranger. "Papa, let me introduce Mr. Wynne."

Mr. Wynne bowed, uttered a few commonplaces to the invalid, and stood talking to him for some time.

Meanwhile, Mr. West noticed with satisfaction the air of refinement and of blue blood (which he adored) in the visitor's appearance and carriage. Wynne was a good name.

No one guessed at the situation, except Lord Tony. His breath was taken away, he looked, he gaped, he repeated the same thing four times over to Mrs. Veryphast—who began to think that this jovial little nobleman was a fool. To see Miss West thus calmly (it looked so at a distance) present her husband to her father, as he afterward expressed it, "completely floored

him." And the old chap, innocent as an infant, and Wynne as cool as a cucumber, as self-possessed as it was possible to be!

And then suddenly Lady Rachel turned round and saw him, and called out in her shrill clear voice, "Why, Mr. Wynne, is it possible! who would have thought of seeing *you* here? Come over and sit beside me," making room on the Chesterfield couch, "and amuse me."

"I'm afraid I'm not a very amusing person," he replied, accepting her beringed fingers, and standing before her.

"You can be, if you like; but perhaps you now reserve all your witty sayings for your stories. Are you writing anything at present?" (Stereotyped question to author.)

"No, not at present," rather stiffly.

"I did not know you knew the Wests. Maddie dear," raising her voice, "you never told me that you and Mr. Wynne were acquaintances."

Madeline affected not to hear, and stooped to pick up the tea-cozy, and hide a face which had grown haggard; while Mr. West, who had gathered that Wynne was a rising man, and that his books were getting talked about, invited him to come and sit near him, and tell him if there was anything going on—anything in the evening papers?"

"You see, I'm still a bit of an invalid," indicating a walking-stick; "shaky on my pins, and not allowed to go to my club. I've had a very sharp attack, and I'm only waiting till the weather is a little milder to start for the south

of France." He had taken quite a fancy to this Wynne (and he did not often fall in love at first sight).

Madeline looked on as she handed her husband a cup of tea, by her parent's orders, and was spellbound with amazement and trepidation to see Laurence and her father, seated side by side, amiably talking politics, both being, as it providentially happened, of the same party. This was to her almost as startling a spectacle as if an actual miracle had been performed in the drawing-room before her eyes.

That her attention strayed in one particular direction did not escape Mrs. Leach's observation. Could this be— But no, he was far too presentable, he was evidently one of the Wynnes of Rivals Wynne; she herself saw the strong family likeness. He was absolutely at his ease, he scarcely noticed Miss West, though she glanced repeatedly at him, was looking pale and agitated, talked extreme nonsense, and filled cups at random.

No, no; this man was *not* the mysterious friend. No such luck for Madeline; and, if he had been, he never could have had the nerve to walk boldly and alone into the very lion's den. But he probably knew the real Simon Pure, and was a go-between and messenger. Yes, that was it. Having thus disposed of her question to her entire satisfaction, and carefully studied Mr. Wynne, from the parting of his hair to the buttons of his boots, she turned and exercised her fascinations on the colonel, who was one of her sworn admirers.

Lady Rachel, who had wearied of her companion, threw him off with an airy grace—which is one of the finest products of civilization—and, on pretense of having a little talk with Mr. West, cleverly managed to monopolize Mr. West's companion, chatting away most volubly—though now and then Mr. West, who was well on the road to recovery, insisted on having *his* say; and, as he discovered, Laurence had leisure to take in the magnificence of his surroundings. The lofty rooms, silken hangings, velvet pile carpets, priceless old china, and wealth of exotic flowers. Everything seemed to cry out in chorus, "Money! money! money! Money everywhere." Madeline, in a velvet gown, sitting in the midst of it, mistress of all she surveyed, with a young baronet on one side, and a duke's heir on the other, absolutely hanging on her words. Her beauty, in its setting of brilliant dress, soft light, and a thousand feminine surroundings, failed to impress him. It was for this—looking about, and taking in footmen, pictures, gildings, silver tea equipage, the heavy scented flowers, soft shaded lamps, the sparkle of diamonds, the titled, appreciative friends in one searching glance—that she had deserted—yes, that was the proper word—deserted him and Harry. Even as he watched her, she was nursing a Chinese lap dog (a hideous beast in his opinion), and calling the attention of her companions to her darling Chow-chow's charms. "Look at his lovely curled tail!" he heard her exclaim, "and his beautiful little black tongue!" And, meanwhile,

the farmer's wife was nursing *her* child, who did not recognize his mother when he saw her.

CHAPTER XXX

MARRIED OR SINGLE?

Mr. West and his new acquaintance had apparently an inexhaustible capital of conversation, and still kept up the ball, as other people departed one after the other. Madeline knew that Laurence was resolved to sit them all out, for, as he laid his cup and saucer beside her, he said, in a whisper only audible to her, "I'm going to wait, I must have a word with you alone"

After a time, when he was positively the last visitor, and the clock was pointing to half past six, he too rose and took leave of Mr. West—who expressed a cordial hope that they would see him whenever they came back to town—and of Madeline, who instead of ringing the bell, crossed the room with the visitor, airily remarking to her father, "I'm just going to show Mr. Wynne that last little picture you bought at Christy's—he is so fond of paintings. I'll be back immediately"—effecting her escape at the same moment by opening another door, through which she waved her husband, saying hurriedly, "In here, in here, the picture is there. Come along and stand before it; and now *what* is it?"

The room was dimly lighted, and there was

not much light upon the painting, but that was of no consequence to Laurence Wynne. He, however, took his stand before it, glanced at it, and then, turning to his companion, said gravely, "All right. I've come to answer your letter in *person*."

"Laurence! I never knew of such madness! Talk of my going to your chambers—it was nothing; but for you to venture here—" and her eyes and gesture became tragic. "Positively, when I saw you walk in, I felt on the point of fainting."

"I am glad, however, that you did not get *beyond* that point. I was surprised to see your father so well; after your account of him—"

"Oh, that was written more than a fortnight ago; he is much better—but weather bound—on account of the snow in the south."

"Well, yes; and your letter was overlooked, and not forwarded. I've been away on circuit."

"I believe you don't care whether I never write to you or not; nor to hear what I'm doing?"

"Oh, but, you know, I am always well posted in the society papers."

"Society papers!"

"Yes; I see them at my club. Besides, I can actually rise to a couple of sixpences a week—and I read how the lovely Miss West was at a ball, looking very smart in straw color; or had been observed at church parade wearing her new sables; or shopping in Bond Street, looking very bright and happy; or—at—the theater glorified in diamonds and gold embroideries. However, I have at last made your father's acquaintance;

he does not seem to be such a terrible ogre! You may have noticed how pleasant he was to me; we got on like a house on fire. I do not think that your disclosure will have the awful consequence you anticipate, and I am perfectly confident that it will be attended with no ill effects as regards his health. I am sure you have taken a wrong estimate of his character. He may fly into a passion just at first—I fancy you may expect *that*—but he will calm down, and we shall all be very good friends; and I am certain he will be delighted with Harry."

"I am not at all so sanguine as to that," returned his wife dubiously; "and you have not yet told me, Laurence—and we have no time to lose—*what* has brought you here?"

"I came, as I have said before, to answer your letter in person. I am glad I have done so, I have seen things with my own eyes, and I can realize your position more clearly than hitherto. I see you surrounded with luxury. A duchess could have no more. I see your father, by no means the frail invalid that I was led to expect; I see your friends—your—pausing expressively —*admirers!* I've had, in short, a glimpse into your life, and realized the powerful cords—you call them claims—that bind you here, and have drawn you away from me." He paused again for a moment, making a quick gesture with his hand to show that Madeline must hear him out. "And now I have come to tell you my last word. You will—or, if you wish, *I* will—tell your father the truth now—within the hour. It will

then depend upon circumstances whether you leave England or not. If your father wishes to have you and Harry with him, I shall say nothing against it."

Madeline listened to this long and authoritative speech with some dismay. This plan would not suit her at all. What would all her gay society friends say—and most of them were coming to the Riviera—if, instead of the brilliant Miss West, they found Mrs. Wynne—a prodigal daughter who had married without leave, and who was hampered with a teething baby? And Laurence was really becoming quite too overbearing! She would not give in—if she succumbed *now*, it was for always. What a fuss he was making, simply because she was going abroad for three months with her father.

"Surely you can wait until we come back. You see papa is not in a state now for any sudden excitement. I will tell him if you wish in a month, when he has completely recovered—"

"I will wait no longer," interrupted her husband. "I have already waited on your good pleasure for close upon a year; put off time after time, with excuse after excuse, until such a period as you could manage to screw your courage to the sticking-point. I now apprehend that that period will be of the same epoch as the Greek Kalends! Frankly, Madeline, I am not going to stand any more nonsense. I am your husband; I can support you—certainly only in a very modest fashion compared to this," looking round. "You will have no carriage, no maid, no fine

clothes—at least not *yet*; they may come by-and-by. Your father is quite fit to travel alone; he ate a remarkably good tea, and told me that he had played two games of billiards this afternoon; were he really feeble, it would be a different affair. It is shameful—yes, that is the only word that will fit the subject—that I should have to remind you of your child! He should be your first care, now he *is* delicate—if you like;—he wants his mother, poor little chap! You will stay at home and look after him. It may not be your pleasure, but it is unquestionably your duty. You can go to Mrs. Holt's and remain there and be welcome as long as you like. You were very happy there once, Maddie," he added rather wistfully. No answer, she merely raised her eyes and surveyed him fixedly. "I will look about for a small furnished flat; a little villa at Norwood, or wherever you like. Lodgings, after *this*, would be too terrible a change—I must admit."

"So would the villa, or even the small flat," she said to herself. In one glance she beheld her future: two servants, *perhaps;* two sitting-rooms, *perhaps;* a strip of back garden with stockings on a line; Laurence absent from morning till night; nothing to do all day long, but attend to her frugal housekeeping; no smart frocks; no smart friends; no excitement, amusements, or society.

She glanced at Laurence. Yes, his linen was frayed, there was a hole in one of his gloves, and in her heart there flared up a passionate hatred

of genteel poverty; it was not life, it was a mere dragged-out existence, from Sunday to Sunday —from a sirloin of beef to a fore-quarter of mutton. Ugh! And, on the other hand, the trip on the Princesse de Lynxky's yacht, the already made up party for the carnival, the dresses that she had ordered for both; the costumes that were to dazzle Nice; the sketch for her carriage at the battle of flowers. At last she said:

"The child is perfectly well, Laurence; I saw him a week ago, and he was then the picture of health. He is too young to trouble any one yet, and Mrs. Holt is an excellent person. Pray how many children are sent out to nurse, and their parents never see them for two or three years. It is always done in France, where they manage things so much better than we do. When Harry is older, it will be quite different; at present it is all the same to a baby where he is, as long as he is well cared for. You have suddenly become most arbitrary and tyrannical, and as to my leaving you for a few months, what is it after all? Look how wives leave their husbands in India, and come home for years!" resolved that all the hard hitting should not be on his side. "You are not like what you used to be, and you are very cruel to call my conduct *shameful*—and very rude, too. You are not going the right way to work, if you want to recall me home—to your home. I may be led, but I won't be driven. I shall take my own way about papa, and tell him at my own time; and, what is more, I shall certainly accompany him to the Riviera,

and when I return I hope," speaking breathlessly, and in little short gasps, "I hope that I shall find you in a more agreeable frame of mind."

There was an appreciable pause, and then he said, in a tone of angry astonishment, "Are you in earnest, Madeline?"

"In earnest? of course I am!"

She looked at him; he had grown visibly paler, and there was a strange expression in his eyes that she did not remember to have ever seen before. Then, speaking in a low, repressed voice:

"In that case I must ask you now to make your choice, once for all, between your two characters. You must for the future always be known as Miss West, or Mrs. Wynne. We will not have this double-dealing any longer. Now, which will you be, married or single?" keeping his eyes steadily fixed on her with a look of quiet determination. "If you wish, we can bury the past."

No reply. Madeline's mind was a battlefield of doubt, fear, amazement, anger, and self-will.

"Speak, Madeline!" he reiterated, impatiently. "Married or single?"

"If it were not for the child," she burst out passionately; "if my life is to be made a burden to me like *this*; if you are always to be reproaching and scolding me—"

"I see," he interrupted quickly, "you would rather be Miss West. The child, I know, is a flimsy excuse, and of no importance; but please

to give me a direct answer. I must have it from your own lips."

At this critical juncture the door was opened, and Mr. West, somewhat irascible from having been left so long alone (Mrs. Leach was dressing for dinner), came in, saying, "Well—well—well—Madeline, what *is* the meaning of this? the room is half in darkness. What the deuce has kept you—has that fellow—? Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Wynne, I did not know you were still here. Can't have seen much of the pictures, unless you and Madeline have eyes like cats." (No, they had only been fighting like cats.)

"Answer me, Madeline," whispered Laurence in a hurried undertone, holding her hand like a vise. This action was not seen by Mr. West, who had his back to them, and was occupied with the poker. "Married or single? Now is the time—I shall tell him."

"*Single!*" replied Madeline, hastily wrenching her hand away, spurred by immediate fears, and regardless of all but the present moment.

"So be it," was the low rejoinder.

And Mr. West, as he vigorously poked the fire, and furiously pressed the bell, had no more idea than poker or button of the important tie that had just been severed.

Mr. Wynne, looking rather white and stern, came over, and again took his leave, and, without any farewell to Madeline, who was still standing in the background in the dusk, he opened the door and departed.

"What have you been doing in here all this

time?" asked Mr. West, querulously. "What the deuce have you been about? Looked to *me* as if you and that fellow had been having a row. Never saw him before. Nice, gentlemanly chap. None of your 'Yaw-haw' sort of people, with no more brains than a pin, and as much conceit as a flock of peacocks. No, this man has sense. I— By the way, Maddie, you look rather put out, too, eh? He has not been proposing for you, has he? Come, now, tell your old daddy," facetiously. "Make a clean breast of it."

"No, papa," she answered, in a rather shaky tone, "he has not; that is just the last thing he would do. You won't see him again, that's one comfort!" she added, with a final blaze of temper.

"Comfort, comfort? Not a bit of it. I'd like to see more of him; and when we come back, remind me to ask him to dinner—he belongs to the Foolscap Club—don't forget. What's his name —Wills—Witts?"

"Wynne."

"Yes, yes, to be sure! A barrister. Humph! one of the Wynnes of Rivals Wynne—good old family. Looks a clever chap, too. Bound to *win*, eh? Not bad, eh?" chuckling. "But what were you talking about? You've not told me *that* yet."

"We were quarreling, papa, that's all. Our first and last quarrel," attempting to laugh it off, with a laugh that was almost hysterical. "There's the first gong!"

"So it is; and I'm quite peckish. Look sharp

and dress!" setting an example on the spot by hurrying out of the room, stick in hand, which stick went tapping all the way down the corridor, till the sound was lost in the distance.

Still Madeline did not stir. She took a step and looked at the picture. Strange omen! It represented a farewell—a man and a girl. The man was a soldier, one of Bonaparte's heroes, and his face was turned away—the girl was weeping. Then she walked over to the fire, and stood looking into it with her hands tightly clasped, her heart beating rather quickly—the after-effects of her late exciting interview. Her mind was tossed about among conflicting emotions—indignation with Lawrence, relief, regret, all stirring like a swarm of bees suddenly disturbed. "What had possessed her to marry Laurence Wynne?" she asked herself, now looking back on their marriage from the lofty eminence of a spoiled, adulated, and wealthy beauty. A certain bitter grudge against him and their days of poverty, and the hateful existence into which he would drag her back, animated her feelings as she stood before the fire alone.

Such an overbearing, obstinate sort of partner would never suit her now. He deserved to be taken at his word—though of course he never meant it. The idea of any sane man relinquishing such a wife never dawned upon her. Yes—her heart was hot within her—he might go. As to the child, that was another matter; *he* was still, of course, her own pretty darling.

They had never, she and Laurence, had a rift

upon the tuneful lute; and now a little plain speaking and a few angry words had parted them for life, as he had said. So be it.

"So be it," she echoed aloud, and pulling a chain from the inside of her dress, she unfastened it, slipped off her wedding ring, and dropped it into the fire, which her father had poked up to some purpose—little dreaming for what an occasion it would serve.

Then Madeline went at last, and scrambled into her tea-gown with haste, and was just down, luckily for herself, in the nick of time.

After dinner, she was quite feverishly gay. She meant to thoroughly enjoy herself, without any arrières pensees. Her sword of Damocles had been removed. She went to the piano, and sang song after song with a feeling that she must do something to keep up her somewhat limp self-esteem and her rapidly falling spirits.

CHAPTER XXXI

A FALSE ALARM

Mr. West had enjoyed his dinner; his appetite was excellent—on a par with his daughter's spirits. He asked no more troublesome questions and departed to bed at an early hour. Mrs. Leach, too, had retired (pleading fatigue), to enjoy a French novel and cocaine, leaving Madeline to sing and make merry alone! After a

while she went over and sat on the fender-stool, and had a long conversation with herself, and tried to persuade her conscience that she had done right. She offered it a sop in assuring herself that the next morning she would go down to the Holt farm and see Harry, and have a comfortable talk with his nurse. Her father would not be out of bed till twelve o'clock. Mrs. Leach, too, rarely appeared before lunch. The coast would be clear. She carried out this resolution to the letter, starting from Waterloo by an early train, arriving a little after ten at the farm in the station fly, greatly to Mrs. Holt's amazement.

She asked many questions, and was warmly assured that "though little Harry was not to say a big, strong boy, like Tom, the plowman's child, of the same age, yet that nothing ailed him but his teeth, and that his eye-teeth were through, and that she (his mother) need not give herself no uneasiness. Mr. Wynne was full of fancies. He was down twice last week, and had been alarming her for nothing."

"Mr. Wynne—Mr. Wynne," said Madeline, becoming agitated and feeling a certain tightness in her throat; but knowing that the fact she was about to disclose must come out sooner or later, and that the first blow was half the battle; "Mr. Wynne and I have had a serious disagreement. We have agreed to differ—and to part," looking steadily out of the window, while her face took a delicate shade of red.

"Laws! gracious mercy!" ejaculated her list-

ener, nearly dropping Master Wynne. "You don't say so! Goodness gracious! you don't mean it, ma'am; you are joking."

"No, indeed"—very decidedly—"I am not, Mrs. Holt; and you need not call me ma'am any more, for though I am married, I am going back to be Miss West—always. Please never call me Mrs. Wynne again."

"But you can't do that," exclaimed Mrs. Holt, in a loud tone of expostulation; "you are married right and right as I am, unless," lowering her voice, "it's a *divorce* you are after getting?"

"Divorce? No. Nothing of the kind; but Mr. Wynne and I have agreed to be—be strangers, and to forget that we have ever been married; and as I am only known to most people as Miss West, it will be quite easy."

"It's nothing of the sort, ma'am," cried the other, energetically, "and you are mad to think of it. Why, I might just as well go and call myself Kate Fisher once more, and give out I was never wed to Holt! That would be a fine how-do-you-do! And where there's children it's worse and more wicked, and more ridiculous to think of still. What's to be said and done about this boy? Who is his mother? You can't say Miss West, now can you? Believe me," seeing her visitor's face of crimson astonishment, "it won't *do*. It's just one of those common squabbles among married folks that blow over. Why, Holt and I has 'ad many a tiff, and we are none the worse. You and Mr. Wynne just make it up. You are both young, and maybe he is de-

termined, and likes to have his own way, as most men do; but—excuse me, ma'am, as an humble friend and a much older woman than yourself, if I make too bold—you *are* a bit trying. You see it's not usual for a young fellow to have his wife leave him, and go galavanting about as a single lady; and then Mr. Wynne is greatly set upon the child. A man, of course, expects that his wife will look after his children *herself*. Excuse me again if I make too free, but I don't like to see a young girl going astray, whoever she be, without just giving her a *word*," wiping her face with a red-spotted handkerchief. (The family was largely supplied with this favorite pattern.)

Madeline sat in silence, feeling very uncomfortable and wretched; but all the same, obstinately bent on her own way.

"Mrs. Holt, you forget there are two sides to a question," she said at last. "I know you mean very kindly; but I have to consider my father. He has no one but me. He is an invalid, and I am his only child, and must study his wishes."

"Maybe if he wasn't so *rich* you wouldn't think of him so much," put in Mrs. Holt, bluntly.

"Yes, I would," retorted Madeline, stung by the sneer; "but I see you are prejudiced, Mrs. Holt. You forget what the Bible says about honoring your father and mother."

"No, no, I don't; but the Bible says a deal about husbands and wives, too. I don't forget

that. Stick to your husband; it's the law o' the land and the law o' the Bible," said Mrs. Holt in her most unyielding voice.

She said a great deal more, but she failed to persuade her visitor or to bend her pride, and she soon perceived that it was of no avail. Money and grandeur, she told herself, had turned her poor head. Some day she would be sorry for what she was doing now; and, anyway, it was an ill and thankless task for a third person to meddle between a married couple. She had always known that *he* was the better of the two; and maybe Holt would allow she was right *now!* Here was a young lady, turning her back on husband and child, taking her maiden name again, and going off to foreign countries. Pretty doings! pretty doings!

At eleven o'clock the fly-man notified that time was up, and the lady must go if she wanted to catch her train. She kissed little Harry over and over again, and wept one or two tears as she said:

"How I wish I could take him with me, even if I could smuggle him as my maid's little boy!"

"Sakes and stars! Mrs. Wynne," exclaimed Mrs. Holt, angrily. "Whatever are you thinking of? I wish his father heard you pass him off as a servant's child. Well, upon my word! I never—" At this crisis words ran short and utterance completely failed her.

"Mind you write to me often, Mrs. Holt—even one line. I have left you a packet of addressed and stamped envelopes. Please write at least

once a week," and, with a hurried good-by she stepped into the fly, pulled down her veil, and was driven off, leaving Mrs. Holt and her son upon the steps, the former exclaiming:

"Well, if she don't beat all!" while Master Wynne dragged violently at her apron, and, pointing to the rapidly disappearing carriage, shouted gleefully:

"Gee-gee! Gee-gee!"

. . . . . .

"It is all right, my dear," whispered Mrs. Leach, receiving her with a significant nod. "I told your father you had gone to lunch with the Countess of Cabinteely, and he was perfectly satisfied."

In another week Madeline was very pleasantly settled in a charming villa at Nice looking out over the blue, tideless sea and the Promenade des Anglais. She had a landau and pair, a pony carriage, and an "at home" day, for not a few of their London acquaintances, early as it was, had come south.

Her father rapidly regained his usual health and amiability, and lavished presents upon her. The horizon before her was literally and metaphorically bright. She was surrounded by quite a brilliant pageantry of flatterers and followers, and could not help feeling a pardonable pride in the sensation she created and in her remarkable social triumphs—in finding bouquets left daily at her door, in seeing her name in enthusiastic little paragraphs in the local papers, in hearing that the fact of her expected presence brought

numbers to an assembly or entertainment in order to see the lovely Miss West, to know that she had not an ambition in the world unfulfilled.

Was not this all-sufficient to prove that her millennium of happiness had commenced? She was the beauty of the season, though she was in this particular the victim of an unsought reputation; she had never aspired to the honor, and the character had been forced upon her. All the same, she did not dislike the position of social queen; and as to Mr. West, he gloried in the fact, and basked in the light of her reflected splendor. He was even content to be known as "Miss West's father." As some men pride themselves on their family, their estates, racehorses, pictures, collection of old china, or silver, he prided himself upon his *daughter*, and was convinced that he got more enjoyment out of his hobby than most people. She was always en evidence, and he could see the curious, envious, and admiring eyes, as he drove with her about Nice, walked with her on the British Quarterdeck at Monte Carlo, or escorted her to concerts, receptions, balls, or garden parties. Foreign dukes and princes were supremely affable to him—all on account of the beaux yeux of his charming and celebrated Madeline.

Worth and Doucet had carte blanche, for Madeline's costumes must be worthy of her, and Madeline was not averse to the idea. A new hat, which became the rage, was named after her. Such is fame! A new yacht had been honored by the same distinction. Youth,

beauty, wealth, celebrity—even Fortune seemed to go out of her way to crowd favors upon this lucky young lady; but, alas! we all know that fortune is a fickle jade, who smiles at one moment, and who scowls the next. Thus, as a kind of social divinity in a gay, earthly Paradise, winter glided on with Madeline. Spring had appeared with a radiant face and a train of flowers; the turf under the olives was covered with anemones, the valleys were starred with primroses; jonquils, tea-roses, and narcissus filled the air with fragrance. Sea and sky reflected one another—sunbeams glanced from the waves, the water seemed to laugh, and the whole face of Nature was one good-natured smile.

The Riviera was full, the carnival about to commence. Madeline was in a state of feverish gayety and exhilaration. She could not now exist without excitement; she must always be doing something or going somewhere, and required a rapid succession of amusements, from a "promenade aux ânes" up the valleys, to riding a bicycle; from a tea picnic to playing trente et quarante. All her regrets, and all her little twinges of remorse (and she had experienced some) had succumbed to the anodyne of a season on the Riviera—and such a season! But on the very first day of the carnival her spirits received a rude shock in the form of an ill-spelled scrawl from Mrs. Holt, which ran as follows;

"HONORED MADAM—I think it rite to let you no, as little Harry has been verry poorly the last

two days; in case he is not better I think you ought to know, and mite wish to come home. It's his back teath. The doctor looked very cerrius last evening, and spoke of konvulshions, but I don't wish to frighten you.

"I am your humble servant,

"KATE HOLT."

This was a heavy blow. The rush of maternal impulse swept everything else out of her mind. Madeline thrust aside her diamonds, ball dress, masks, bouquets, and hurried off on foot to the telegraph office, and dispatched a message —"If he is not better I start to-night; reply paid." And then she returned to the Villa Coralie, quivering and trembling with impatience.

In case of the worst, she told Josephine to pack a few things, as she might be going to England that night by the Rapide.

Josephine's jaw dropped; she was enjoying herself enormously. One of the waiters at the Cercle was her cousin. The carnival was just commencing; this was terrible—must she be torn away, too! Her face expressed her feelings most accurately, and her mistress hastened to reassure her.

"I shall not require you, Josephine; I only go to see a sick friend. If I hear no good news, I start this evening; if the tidings are better, I remain—but I am almost sure to go."

"Et monsieur?" elevating hands and eyebrows.

Yes, how was she to announce her departure to her father? She made the plunge at once. Her fears and her anxieties were not on his account now. She was desperate, and ready to brave anything or anybody.

She ran down into his cool sanctum, with its wide-open windows overlooking the bay, its gaudy, striped awnings, and veranda full of flowers, and finding her parent smoking a cigarette and absorbed in the "Financial News," began at once.

"Papa, I've had bad news from England. A —one who is very dear to me is ill, and if I don't hear better news by telegram, I wish to start to-night for London."

"Madeline!" he cried, laying down the paper and gazing at her in angry astonishment. "What are you thinking about? Your sick friend has her own relatives; they would never expect *you* to go flying to her bedside from the other end of France. Nonsense, nonsense!" he concluded imperatively, once more taking up the "News," and arranging his pince-nez with grave deliberation.

The matter was decided. But Madeline was resolved to make an equal show of determination, and said, in a stubborn tone:

"Papa, in this I must have my own way. It is not often I take my own course; I do everything and go everywhere to please you. You must allow me to please myself for once."

Mr. West pushed back his chair a full yard, and gazed at his daughter.

"Do not throw any obstacle in my way, papa, nor seek to know where I am going."

"Ah, ah! Not a lover, I hope, madam?" he gasped. "The curate, the—the drawing-master?"

"No; let that suffice, and let us understand one another, once for all. I have been an obedient daughter to you; I have made sacrifices that you have never dreamed of"—(Ah! the poor curate! thought Mr. West)—"and you must give me more liberty. I am of age to go and come as I please unquestioned. I will do nothing wrong; you may trust me. I can take excellent care of myself, and I *must* have more freedom."

"Must, must, must! How many more 'musts'? Well, at any rate, you are a girl to be trusted, and there is something in what you say. I dare say you have sacrificed some girlish fancy; you have nursed me; you are a credit to me. Yes, and you shall come and go as you please, on the trust-me-all-in-all principle, and the understanding that you do not compromise yourself in any way; but you have your advantages, Madeline—a fine home and position, and everything money can buy. Remember, you will miss the best ball if you start to-night, and the Princess Raggawuffinsky was to call for you. Have you thought of *that?*"

"Oh!" with a frantic wave of her hand, "what is a *ball*?"

"Well, well, well! How much cash do you require, and when will you be back?"

"I have plenty of money. If all goes well, I shall be back in a few days—as soon as possible—for the regatta, perhaps."

And so, with a few more remarks and assurances, and expostulations on Mr. West's part at her traveling alone, she pocketed a check pressed upon her, and left the room victorious.

Her father was easier to deal with than she had anticipated. Laurence was right—for once!

Then she ran upstairs to her own sanctum and locked the door, pulled off her dress, put on her cool dressing-wrapper, and sat down in a fever of mind and body to wait for the telegram. She remained motionless, with her eyes fastened on the clock, a prey to the wildest fears. Supposing the child was dead!—she shuddered involuntarily; if it *were*, she would go out of her senses. Her anxiety increased with every hour. She was in a frenzy of impatience, now pacing the room, now sitting, now standing, now kneeling in prayer.

At last there was a knock at the door—Josephine's knock. Josephine's voice, "Une dépêche pour vous, mademoiselle."

Mademoiselle's hand shook so much that she could hardly open the door, hardly tear asunder the envelope, or read its contents—at a gulp. Josephine had never seen her mistress in this frenzied, distraught condition—her color like death, her face haggard, her eyes staring, her hair hanging in loose *abandon*. What did it mean? The telegram brought good news. It said, "He is much better, and in no danger. You need not come."

The sender's name was not notified. Whoever it was, it mattered little; the relief was inexpressible. What a fright Mrs. Holt had given her, and all for nothing!

Miss West went to the ball that night, and danced until the dawn flickered along the horizon. She was one of the most brilliant figures at the carnival, and received marked notice in distinguished quarters. At the battle of flowers, she and her equipage were the cynosure of all eyes. The open victoria was made to counterfeit a crown, and covered with pink and white azaleas. Miss West was attired to correspond. Four beautiful white horses were harnessed in pink, and ridden by postilions in pink satin jackets; and the general effect was such that the committee promptly awarded the first banner to "la belle Anglaise," despite the close rivalry of a celebrated demi-mondaine, who furiously flung the second banner in the faces of the judges, and, with her yellow flowers and four black ponies, had whirled off in high dudgeon and a cloud of dust.

At last this enchanting period was brought to an end by the Riviera's own best patron—the sun. People melted away as if by magic. Some went on to the Italian lakes, some to Switzerland, many to England. Madeline and her father deferred their return until the end of May, stopping in Paris en route; and when they reached home the season was at its height, and the hall and library tables were white from a heavy fall of visiting-cards and notes of invitation.

Lady Rachel and Lord Tony came in on the evening of their arrival to pay a little neighborly call, and to tell them that they must on no account miss a great match—the final in a polo tournament at Hurlingham—the next afternoon. Every one would be there.

This speech acted as a trumpet-call to Mr. West.

"Every one will see that we have returned," he said to himself, and it will save a lot of trouble. Then, aloud, "All right, then, Lady Rachel, we shall certainly go. Madeline must trot out some one of her smart Paris frocks. And, Madeline, you might send a wire over to Mrs. Leach, and offer her a seat down."

CHAPTER XXXII

MR. JESSOP'S SUGGESTION

Laurence Wynne had taken but one person into his confidence, and that was Mr. Jessop. As he sat smoking a post-midnight cigar over the fire in his friend's chambers, he told him that Mrs. Wynne no longer existed. She preferred to stick to her name of West, and wished to keep her marriage a secret always from—not alone her father, but the whole world.

This much he had divulged. He felt that he must speak to some one. His heart was so sore that he could not maintain total silence, and who so fitting a confidant as his old friend Dick Jessop? He was chivalrous to Madeline in spite of all that had come and gone, and veiled her defects as skillfully as he could, not speaking out of the full bitterness of his soul. But Mr. Jessop's active imagination filled in all the delicately traced outline—perhaps in rather too black a shading, if the truth were known!

However, he kept his surmises discreetly to himself, and puffed and pondered for a long time in silence. At last he spoke:

"I would let her alone, and not bother my head about her, Laurence! She is bound to come back."

"I don't think so," responded the other curtly.

"Yes; she will return on account of the child."

"And what would such a coming-back be worth to *me?* It will not be for my sake," said Wynne, holding his feelings under strong restraint.

"I know of something that would bring her, like a shot out of a seventy-four pounder," observed Mr. Jessop after another pause, surveying the coals meditatively as he spoke.

"What?"

"Your paying attention to another woman. Get up a strong and *remarkable* flirtation with some pretty, smart society matron. Lots of them love your stories. Love me, love my stories. Love my stories, love me, eh? Show yourself in the park, at theaters—better still, a little dinner at the Savoy—and Mrs. Wynne will be on in the scene before you can say Jack Robinson! Jealousy will fetch her!"

"I wouldn't give a straw for the affection of a woman who was influenced solely by what you have suggested. No, no; I married her before she knew her own mind—before she had a chance of seeing other people, and the world. Now she has seen other people, and become acquainted with the world, she prefers both to *me.* On five

or six hundred a year, with no rich relations, Madeline and I would have been happy enough. As it is, she is happy enough. I must get on alone as well as I can. I made a mistake. I was too hasty."

"Yes, marry in haste, and repent at leisure!" said Mr. Jessop, grimly.

"I don't mean that; I mean that I mulled that business at Mrs. Harper's. I should have wired to Mrs. Wolferton, or insisted on Mrs. Harper taking Madeline back, and given her time to turn round and to reflect; but I rushed the whole thing. However, I must now abide by the position I am placed in with what fortitude I can."

"You married her, and gave her a home, when she had no friend," put in Mr. Jessop, sharply. Mr. Jessop was devoted to Laurence, and excessively angry with Laurence's wife.

"It is not every one I would confide in, Dick," said his companion; "but you are my oldest chum. You are welcome to be introduced to the skeleton in my cupboard—an old friend's privilege. We need never talk of this again. I suppose people get over these things in time! There is nothing for it but work—plenty of work."

Although he discoursed in this cool, self-restrained manner, Mr. Jessop knew, by years of experience, that his friend—who never made much, or, indeed, any, fuss about his feelings—had felt the blow in every nerve of his body.

"Do not think too hardly of her, Dicky," he exclaimed, promptly reading the other's thoughts.

"She is very young, and very pretty. I'm only a poor, hard-working barrister; and she had an awful time once—you know when! We must never forget how she came through that ordeal. And, after all, I have no human rival. If she does not care for me, she cares for no other man. She is blessed with a particularly cool, unsusceptible temperament. My only rival is riches. It is the money that has ousted me. The enormous strength of wealth has pushed me out of her heart, and barred the door. Time, another powerful engine, may thrust her out of mine!"

"Time! Bosh. Time will never thrust away the fact that she is the mother of your child. He is a tie between you that neither time, riches, nor any amount of balderdash you may talk—nor any number of matrimonial squabbles—can ever break."

"You are mistaken in your idea of the whole case, Jessop, and under a totally wrong impression. Nothing can bridge the gulf between Madeline and me, unless she chooses to come back of her own accord, and unsay a good deal that she has said; and this she will never do—never. She does not care a straw for me. I merely remind her of days of squalor, sickness, and hideous poverty. She was delighted to accept the freedom which I offered her—"

"And what a fool you were to do it!" exclaimed his listener, contemptuously.

"Not at all; but I should be a fool were I to try to keep a wife, who is not even one in name,

and never casts a thought to me from month's end to month's end. I shall be—nay, I am—free too."

"But not in a legal sense, my dear boy; you cannot marry again."

"No, thank you," emphatically knocking the ashes off his cigar with great deliberation as he spoke. "The burned child dreads the fire. I made a bad start this time, and even if I had the chance—which, please God, I never shall have—I would not tempt Fate again, no matter what the provocation. Women are a great mystery: their chief faults and virtues are so unexpected. Look at Madeline: when we were paupers she was a ministering angel. Now that she is rich, she is merely a smart society girl, and—"

"And milliners, jewelers, flatterers minister to *her*," broke in Jessop.

"I intend to make my profession my mistress, and to devote myself to her heart and soul. The law is a steady old lady."

"And a very cantankerous, hard, flinty-faced, capricious old hag you'll find the goddess of Justice, my dear fellow. I am going to give up paying my addresses to her! My uncle has left me a tidy legacy. I intend to settle down in comfort in his old manor-house—shoot, fish, hunt, burn my wig, gown, and law books, and turn my back forever on the Inns of Court."

"Jessop, you are not in earnest."

"I am," impressively; "and what's one man's

loss is another man's gain. It will be all the better for you, Laurence, since you are so bent upon the woolsack. I'll give you a heave-up with pleasure. You will now get all Bagge & Keepe's business, for one thing—and let me tell you that that is no trifle.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"ONE OF YOUR GREATEST ADMIRERS"

It was a perfect afternoon, and Hurlingham was crowded. Every seat bordering the polo ground was occupied, and the brilliant hues of hats, gowns, and parasols made a sort of ribbon border to the brilliant green turf. Mr. West—a fussy or punctual man according to people's point of view—had arrived early with his party, and, so to speak, planted his fair charges under one of the umbrella awnings, and in a most central and commanding situation, where Madeline, in a white costume, which set off her vivid dark beauty, was seen and greeted by many acquaintances. Lord Montycute, Captain Vansittart, and a smart lady friend (Mrs. Veryphast) shared the shade of the canvas umbrella, and spasmodically proffered morsels of the latest and choicest news, for the polo was absorbing, the match

very fast and closely contested, the excitement intense. During an interval Lady Rachel drifted near—clad in a rainbow costume, and talking volubly and emphatically to a man. Her quick, roving eye caught sight of Madeline's comfortable little party, and she swept down upon her at once.

"Oh, Maddie, my dear girl, how nice and cool you look, and I'm half dead, standing baking in the sun, and not a chair to be had for love or money! Ah, you have two to spare, I see! Here—here is actually one for *you*." She called to her escort, who had stopped to speak to a passing friend. "Madeline," she continued, "I think you know Mr. Wynne, who writes. Mr. Wynne, Miss West is one of your greatest admirers! She knows all your stories by heart."

This was a fiction, invented on the spur of the moment. Her ladyship coined many a little lie.

Madeline looked up bewildered. The gentleman who was taking off his hat to her was—Laurence!—and yet not Laurence. What had he done to himself? He had discarded his beard, and was fashionably clean-shaven; moreover he was fashionably dressed in the orthodox long frock coat, and wore a flower in his buttonhole, and the most absolutely correct gloves and tie.

So much depends upon the style, shape, and color of a man's tie—and the very maker's name! A rashly selected tie may stamp a man's taste

quite as fatally as the wrong number and pattern of buttons proclaim the date of his coat!

The removal of his beard had entirely changed Laurence Wynne's appearance. He looked much younger: he had a very square chin, his mouth was expressive—more sarcastic than smiling—with thin, firmly-closed, but well-cut lips. Had she known of that mouth and chin, had she guessed at them—well—she would have thought twice before she married their proprietor. As she looked up she colored to her hair when she met his steady, cool glance. This meeting was no surprise to him, for he had noted the entree of the beauty, her marvelous costume, and her train of admirers. He had not, however, intended to come to such close quarters. He was taken unawares when he found himself in her neighborhood, and he was determined to escape immediately, in spite of Lady Rachel. The silence that followed Lady Rachel's loud prattle was becoming noticeable, and curious eyes were turned upon him when he said very distinctly—

"I don't know if I am so fortunate as to be remembered by—Miss West?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, rather obviously avoiding looking at him, with a bright patch of color on either cheek.

"Miss West has such an enormous acquaintance of young men that she must get a little confused sometimes—a little mixed, don't you, Maddie? Now, Mr. Wynne, I see what you are up to," said Lady Rachel; "but no, you shall not run away. Here, sit upon this chair. I

had great difficulty in capturing you, you are so run-after and spoiled, and now I am not going to let you desert. You ought to be thankful for a seat in the shade, and among such pleasant company!" As he reluctantly seated himself at the very outskirts of the group, she continued—"Now, you must not sit there looking like a snared animal, watching for some chance of escape. Do tell me all about the heroine of your last story. How is it that you are so familiar with all our little ways and weaknesses? You know too much. One would almost suppose that you were a married man!"

"I think it must be time to go to tea," said Madeline, glancing appealingly at her father, who had just joined them.

"Tea! Don't you wish you may get it! There is not a single vacant table on the lawn. I've just been to look. Hullo! Ah—er—Wynne, how do you do?"

Mr. Wynne had been pointed out to him as a rising junior at the bar—a coming man in literature, who wielded an able pen, and was quite one of the season's minor celebrities. His sketches were a feature of the day—a short one, naturally. Every one was talking of him.

Mr. West loved a celebrity—if he was gentlemanly and in good society, *bien entendu*—nearly as much as he loved a lord, but not quite; and he added—

"I remember you were at our house last winter, and you are interested in paintings and art. You must look us up, eh?—and come and dine."

"Thank you. You are very kind."

"We've just come back from the Riviera. Delightful place! Were you ever there?"

"No, I've never been nearer to it than Lyons."

"But I've been there," broke in Lady Rachel; "and I shall never go again, on account of the earthquakes, although it was capital fun at the time."

"Fun!" repeated Mr. West, with a look of amazement.

"Yes, half the refugees were running about in blankets fastened with hairpins, afraid to return for their clothes. Oh, they were too absurd! A whole trainful went to Paris in their dressing-gowns—some in bare feet. Every one was different—'out of themselves,' as they say in France. One old lady, in her mad excitement in speeding some relations, actually tore off her wig and waved it after them."

"Poor old dear! *How* she must have regretted it subsequently!" said Lord Montycute. "My sister was there at the same time, and paid twenty pounds a night for the luxury of sleeping in the hotel omnibus. Nothing would induce her to go to bed indoors. The hotel was cracked from top to bottom!"

"I don't care for the Riviera," remarked Lady Rachel. "It's too hot, and the scenery is ridiculously gaudy. It always reminded me of a drop-scene. I declare to you, sitting on a promenade, facing the blue sea and blue sky, and pale, buff promontories and palms, with a band playing in

the neighborhood, I have felt as if I was in the stalls of a theater."

"Oh, shame!" cried Mrs. Leach. "You have no feeling for the beauties of Nature."

"I thought Monte Carlo lovely—the garden too exquisite for words."

"And the tables?" inquired Mr. West significantly.

"Yes, I had my own *pet* table; and at first I was successful. I always went on the 'doz-ens,' or 'passe.' One day I made ninety pounds in an hour; but, alas! I lost it all in about ten minutes."

"The tables always *do* win in the long run," said Mr. West, sententiously.

"Yes," agreed Lord Montycute, "they have no feeling, no emotions. When they gain they are not excited; when they lose they are not depressed; and this is their advantage."

"Oh, but they cannot leave off if they *are* losing," cried Lady Rachel. "We score there."

"*You* did not score, at any rate," remarked Mrs. Leach, with a smile.

"No; I wish I *had* left off. There is Mrs. Raymond Tufto. Did you see her at Nice, Madeline?"

"Oh, yes; she went everywhere."

"She is wearing that same flower toque. I *am* so sick of it," cried Mrs. Veryphast, impatiently.

"Nevertheless she is one of the prettiest women in London," observed Captain Vansittart. "She

has such a saintly expression, and she looks so *good*."

"She is a horribly heartless wretch. She goes off for months on the Continent, and leaves her children to nurses at home," said Lady Rachel, viciously. "She has one dear little tot of two that actually does not know her by sight."

"It is quite the French fashion to board out babies," remarked Mrs. Leach, who was invariably in opposition to Lady Rachel.

"Turn them out to walk like young hounds," drawled Captain Vansittart.

"Mrs. Tufto, bad as she may be, is nothing to Lady Blazer," continued Mrs. Leach, impressively. "She has a nursery full of girls, and yet, what *do* you think? When she was asked the other day to subscribe to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, she said, 'Delighted! There is only one species of animal I loathe, and that's a *child*.' "

"Oh, I say—come! I don't believe that," cried Mr. West, "of any woman—or even a man. I'm rather partial to *nice* small children myself."

"Mr. Wynne," said Lady Rachel, turning on him suddenly, "why are you so silent? You know it is your *metier* to talk."

"Then why do you grudge me a well-earned holiday?" he asked imperturbably.

"I believe you are studying us for your next sketch; taking us in your literary kodak."

"No, indeed! I am not a reporter for a society paper."

"Oh, I don't mean about our dresses and hats, or that; I mean character sketches."

"How I should like to sit to you for *mine!*" said Mrs. Veryphast, vivaciously, moving her chair an inch or two nearer to his. "I *do* wish you would make a study of me, and put me in one of your charming stories or dialogues."

"It would have a fabulous circulation if *you* were the heroine," said Lord Montycute, with a bow.

Mrs. Veryphast smiled, well pleased. She was not always able to distinguish between impertinence and flattery. Mrs. Veryphast was evidently anxious to annex another lady's friend, who had edged himself so far away that he was quite an outsider. But he would not be appropriated, neither could he effect his escape.

"Mr. Wynne," said Lady Rachel, briskly, "you are up in all the principal subjects of the day. Do tell us what you think of the new woman."

"That she will be an old woman in a few years."

"So shall I. You are meanly evading the question."

"I think— Let me think again."

"You mean, let me *dream* again. You seem to be half asleep this afternoon. Well?"

"On reflection, I consider that she is a devastating social influence."

"That can be read in two ways, you wary fox. What is your opinion of the emancipation of women—wives especially?"

"Upon my word! Lady Rachel, I must protest!" he answered, with a somewhat fixed smile. "You are endeavoring to obtain my opinion gratis. I cannot afford it. How am I to live?"

Meanwhile Madeline, looking rather pale, listened furtively to this passage of arms.

"I think you are *too* horrid. At any rate, it cannot hurt your pocket to tell me if you approve of the higher education of my sex."

"No; I prefer the ancient Greek mode—complete isolation, wool-spinning, and no books."

"Gracious! I shall pity your *wife.*"

His eyes and Madeline's met for one half second all the way across Lady Rachel's bonnet and Captain Vansittart's broad shoulders. Then he stood up.

"What—going? Oh, Mr. Wynne!" protested his captor, with a little scream.

"I am extremely sorry; but I really *must.* I see a man over there that I want to speak to particularly; and I shall lose sight of him if I don't look sharp." And taking off his hat with a comprehensive smile, he was gone.

Yes, Madeline watched him under her parasol. He looked as well as any one—in fact, quite distinguished. She wondered vaguely who was his tailor.

Then people began to discuss him, and she gathered by a word from Mrs. Veryphast, and

another from Captain Vansittart, that the general opinion of Laurence Wynne was highly favorable.

"Of fine old stock, but poor; but brains, and good race, ought to bring him something," said Mrs. Leach

"An heiress!" suggested Mrs. Veryphast, with a giggle. "And now I propose that we do adjourn, and go to tea."

From a distance Laurence noted the party *en route* to refreshments, Madeline and Lord Montycute bringing up the rear. She belonged to another world than his, there was no room in her life for him and Harry. As he had chafed in Lady Rachel's chains, he had caught snatches of the conversation of the butterflies who fluttered round his wife. He heard of balls, river parties, rides, picnics. He was aware that Miss West's society was in immense demand; he caught one laughing announcement "that she had four engagements for the next evening, and not a spare hour for the next three weeks."

Not long after that, as he and a friend were walking down to Parsons Green station, they were passed by a splendid carriage, which gave a glimpse of two frothy-looking parasols, and two tall hats.

"There goes Miss West," explained his companion, "the Australian heiress and beauty, with Lord Tony on the back seat. I hear it is quite settled, they are to be married in the autumn."

"Are they? Who is your authority?"

"I can't say; it's in the air. I wonder she was not snapped up, long ago, for although old West is about as common as they make 'em, yet every one allows that his daughter is charming."

CHAPTER XXXIV

MR. WYNNE IS A WIDOWER

THE first opportunity that Madeline could find she ventured a visit to the Holts. It was a lovely June morning as she walked up to the front entrance of the sequestered farm. She found Harry—*her* Harry, a pretty little fellow with fair soft hair and surprised dark eyes, sitting alone upon the doorstep, and nursing a pointer pup. It was useless for her to ask in her most winning manner—

"Harry, dear, don't you know me? Darling, I am your own mother; your own mummy!"

Harry simply frowned and shook his curls, and clutched the puppy tightly in his clasp as if he meant to throttle it.

Presently Mrs. Holt came upon the scene, with turned-up sleeves, and stout bare arms, fresh from the dairy. She was exceedingly civil, and exceedingly cool; invited Miss West into the little parlor, dusted a chair for her, and did her best to soften the rigidity and hauteur of little Harry's aspect.

After some conversation about his double teeth, the weather, and Nice, she said—

"Suppose you and he just go round the garden, ma'am, and make friends. I'll leave you to yourselves, while I go and see after the dinner."

"But pray don't get anything extra for *me*, Mrs. Holt," implored Madeline. "Just what you have yourselves. I shall be very angry if you make a stranger of me."

Mrs. Holt muttered some incoherent reply, and went away saying to herself—

"Not make a stranger of you! and what else? Not make any difference for you! I'm thinking you'd look very glum if I were to set you down to beans and bacon, my grand young London madam. Dear me, but she *is* changed! She cannot stir without a sound of rustling; and the price of one of her rings would build a new barn!"

Meanwhile, Harry and his mother went round the garden as desired, hand-in-hand. He could talk very plainly for his age, and trotted along by her side, considerably thawed in manner. This process was due to a lovely ball she had unexpectedly produced, a gay picture-book, and a packet of candy. He chattered away in a most friendly style, and showed her the pigeons, the bees, and where the lark was buried—in fact, all what he considered the lions of the place; and every moment unfolded to his delighted companion some additional marvel and charm.

By the time that one o'clock dinner was ready,

the couple were on excellent terms, and he had even gone so far as to kiss her, and to put his little holland-clad arms round her neck of his own accord. The sensation was extremely pleasant.

After dinner—*not* consisting of beans and bacon—Mrs. Holt and her guest had a long *tête-a-tête.* The condition of Harry's health was first disposed of, then the state of his wardrobe came under discussion.

"I should tell you, ma'am, since you ask, that all the lovely frocks and pelisses you sent from France are just laying there. Mr. Wynne won't allow him to wear one of them, nor anything you gave him."

"And why not, pray?" demanded the young lady with considerably heightened color.

"He told me quite serious, one day," said Mrs. Holt, now speaking with ill-suppressed satisfaction, "that what he had worn and *was* wearing, as you gave him, he might wear out; but no new things were to be accepted, as you had nothing to do with the child now. So I put them all by, just as they came, in the front room wardrobe, and there they are."

"What does he mean?" asked Madeline, in a sharp key.

"I'm sure, ma'am, *you* know better than I do; he said as he had no objection to your seeing the child, now and then, but that was all. I expect Mr. Wynne can be real stiff and determined," smoothing out her apron with an air of solemn disapproval, not of him, but of her visitor.

Madeline said nothing, but she felt a good deal. Mrs. Holt, from her manner more than from her words, sat in judgment upon her. She, this wife of a common farmer, actually dared to criticise the beautiful and admired and spoiled Miss West.

"You see, ma'am," she continued, "you are, and you are not, the child's mother. He does not recognize you as that — I mean the child himself — you have kept away too long. In course you can't be in two places at once, nor be both Miss West and Mrs. Wynne. 'Tisn't my wish, nor my own doing, as I have taken your place with the child. He is main fond of me. And then, poor Mr. Wynne, he felt your leaving him at first, no doubt of that; but he is getting over it now, men haven't as much feeling as we *think*."

Madeline listened with a guilty conscience, every word went home to her with as much force as a blow. She had chosen her line, and she must stick to single blessedness. There was to be no going back, at any rate at present.

This conviction made her reckless, and she rushed with eagerness into the full tide of London gayety with a passionate desire to escape from the past, to get away from the clamoring of a still articulate conscience, to annihilate memory by some great and effective action, and to be happy! But memory was not so easily stifled, and now that Laurence had disappeared from her life—such is the contrariness of humanity—she wished him back. At times—at races,

at Hurlingham, in great assemblies, at the theater, or in the Row—she searched the crowds for him in vain. Mrs. Leach, who was her constant companion and self elected chaperon, reading her young friend by the light of her own memories, noticed that she was not like other girls, content and happy with her company and surroundings. There was a restlessness in her manner; she seemed to be continually looking for some one—some one who never came, who was never to be seen.

Madeline preferred Lady Rachel's, or Mrs. Lorimer's company to the splendid widow's society, and made futile efforts to shake off her shackles—efforts which were vain.

Yes, among all Madeline's social successes, in the midst of her most dazzling triumphs, she ever cast a glance around in search of Laurence. Surely, if he went to see her in the full blaze of her triumph, he would think twice ere he permanently renounced such a treasure! She felt hot and angry when she thought of him, but nevertheless she longed to see him once more—odious, unreasonable and tyrannical as he was. Surely he did not mean to abandon her in reality. That idea had no place in her mind when she was abroad. There everything and everybody seemed different. It was easy, in a strange country, far away from Laurence and Harry, to drop a misty cloud over the past, and to feel as if she really *was* Miss West. But here in London, where she had lived as a married woman, and had struggled—and oh, what a

struggle!—with the awful question of how to support a household on nothing, the idea was unnatural; nay, it went further, it was improper. She would perhaps write to him some day, and hold out the olive branch; but not yet, and meanwhile she must see him.

Mr. West was still extremely uneasy about himself. He found the heat, and dust, and noise of London trying to his health, he declared; and, much to the disgust of Mrs. Leach and other interested friends, he announced that the middle of July would not find him in England. He was going to Carlsbad, to Switzerland, and to winter abroad—probably at Biarritz.

Ere she was thus carried off, Madeline resolved to see Laurence. She prevailed upon Lady Rachel to take her to the Temple church. She was aware that he went there every Sunday, and Lady Rachel, little guessing the reason of her friend's sudden enthusiasm for the venerable edifice, and anxiety to hear a certain well-known preacher, procured two tickets for benchers' seats, and occupied them the ensuing Sabbath.

These seats were roomy and elevated, and commanded an excellent view of the whole center of the church where the members of the various inns sat. They came in gradually, not in legal garb, as Madeline had half expected, but in their usual dress; and she strained her eyes so eagerly that her sharp little friend nudged her and said, "For whom are you looking, Maddie?"

"Oh, no one," coloring. "It is such a very interesting old place. I like staring about. What crowds of people who cannot get seats and have to stand."

At this juncture the organ pealed out and every one stood up as the choir filed in; and just immediately afterward Lady Rachel exclaimed, in an excited whisper, "There's Mr. Wynne—look!"

Of course Madeline never moved her eyes from him; they followed him, as he found a seat at the end of a pew, luckily well within her view. He could not see her, but she could study him, especially when she knelt down, with her two hands shielding either side of her face from watchful Lady Rachel.

He looked well, a little grave perhaps, a little worn; no doubt he was working hard. He did not stare about as did others, nor cast a single glance at the radiant figure in the benchers' seats. At times he seemed preoccupied and buried in thought, but he gave his undivided attention to the sermon, to which he listened with folded arms and a critical air, as if he were weighing every word of it in his mind, and as though it were a summing up of evidence being laid before a jury of which he was a member. There was no abstracted air about him, his mind was on the alert, he had cast the past or future aside, and was absorbed in the present.

The sermon concluded, crowds flocked through the ancient doorway, and scattered outside. Lady Rachel still lingered, and looked about

eagerly, ere taking her departure westward, and then she exclaimed, in a disgusted voice:

"I wanted to have asked Mr. Wynne to lunch, if I had seen him to speak to," shaking out her parasol and opening it with a jerk of annoyance. "But there he goes, marched off by that girl in the green and blue frock—the very sight of it turns me cold! And do you see the old papa rushing after them, and accosting him with rapture? The way in which girls throw themselves at men's heads nowadays is abominable. However, it's a mistake for these bold creatures to imagine that men will marry them. They either take a wife from the stage or music-hall, or some quiet little country mouse. As for Mr. Wynne, he is a widower, and I believe his wife was a perfect *horror*—so he will not be caught again! Ah, here's a hansom! Now, my dear girl, get in, get in. These dry sermons make me frightfully thirsty. I am dying for my lunch."

CHAPTER XXXV

INFORMATION THANKFULLY RECEIVED

THE house in Belgrave Square remained closed for many months, while its master roamed from one fashionable continental resort to another, in search of what he called health—but which was merely another name for variety and amusement. Madeline was at first averse to this protracted absence; but she had excellent news of little Harry. Laurence was still in what she called "the sulks"; and every day weakened her hold more and more on her former ties, and bound her to her present condition. In the early twenties a girl is very adaptable, and it had come to this, that at times Miss West forgot that she had ever had other than this sunny, butterfly existence; and, if her conscience occasionally made a claim on behalf of her child, she promptly told herself that he was well cared for, and that Lady Frederick Talboys sent all her children out to nurse until they were three years of age, and Harry was barely two. As for Laurence, he would come to his senses in time; and the idea

of telling her father of her marriage she now put away in the lumber-room of her brain, and rarely looked at.

About Christmas Mr. and Miss West and suite arrived at Biarritz, put up at a large and fashionable hotel, and occupied the best rooms on the first floor. They found Biarritz charming, Madeline liked the sea, the rolling Atlantic breakers, the Basque tongue, and the bronzed semi-Spanish peasantry. Mr. West was charmed with the society, the golf links, and the Casino.

One day Mrs. Leach casually arrived at their hotel, with a number of basket-trunks and a maid, looking very handsome, and was enchanted to meet dearest Madeline and dear Mr. West. She had heard that they were at Pau, and was so surprised to discover them. Madeline was such a naughty girl about writing, such a hopelessly lazy correspondent.

To tell the truth, Miss West was secretly anxious to shake off the tenacious widow, and was purposely silent.

In less than a week the lady had resumed her sway over Madeline's papa. Her soft manners, pathetic eyes, stately presence, and low, caressing voice proved his undoing. He had almost forgotten the Honorable Mrs. Leach—and here, in three days, he was as much, or more, her slave as ever. So much for men's vanity and women's wiles. She flattered—he confided. It came to pass, as a matter of course, that the lady occupied a seat beside Madeline in the landau every

afternoon. Her maid tripped down with her wraps and parasol precisely as if it were her mistress's own carriage. Her mistress also occupied Miss West's private sitting-room, received her friends in it, wrote, and worked, and read all the Wests' papers and books, shared their table at meals in the salle à manger, and (but this was never known to Madeline) her little weekly account for room and board was always furnished to and settled by Madeline's papa; a few whispered words on the balcony one night had arranged this trifling matter. The handsome widow was completely identified with the West family, and was included in all their invitations as well as their accounts. Every evening, after dinner, she and Mr. West sat aloof in a little alcove while he smoked cigarettes, or on the veranda while he smoked and sipped his coffee, and she amused him and cut up many of the gay and unsuspicious company for his delectation. She was also confidential respecting her own affairs. If she had told him their true position his few scanty locks would have stood on end. She was almost at the end of her wits, and he was her sole hope, her last resource. For years she had lived beyond her income—a small one. Her dressmaker's bills would have staggered even him. She owed money in all drections; her creditors were pressing, her society friends were not pressing with invitations; her husband's connections ignored her. But if she could establish herself in Mr. West's heart and home, as his second wife, she would have before

her a new and delightful career. And she had begun well! Certainly Madeline was irresponsive and cool, but always pleasant and polite. Why was Madeline changed? However, once she was Madeline's mamma, Madeline would find a difference! Every night, as Mrs. Leach stepped into the lift, to be borne aloft to her own bower, she said to herself, "He will certainly propose to-morrow," but alas! one evening these cheering presentiments were crushed.

The conversation had turned upon Madeline. She was a favorite subject with her father.

"She nursed me well and pulled me through that nasty illness last winter. I shall never forget her. One would have said she was accustomed to nursing—and nursing a man, too, ha, ha! I should miss her terribly if she married."

"But there is no prospect of that at present, is there?" asked his listener softly.

"No. She is too stand-off. She will ride and dance, and talk and laugh, but once a man's attentions become marked, she freezes up! I'm afraid she is serious when she says she won't marry. There's Lord Tony hanging after her."

"Oh, don't you think he is very much epris with Miss Teale of New York?"

"Not he!" impatiently. "I dare say he and Madeline will settle it some day."

"And then how lonely you will be, dear Mr. West! *I* know what it is like."

"Yes, I suppose it will be a little dull, unless the young people will live with me."

"Oh!" rather sharply, "they won't do *that!*"

"If they don't, I shall have to set up another housekeeper, to get some one to take pity on me and marry again," and he looked significantly into Mrs. Leach's unabashed eyes.

Mrs. Leach held her breath.

"But I should never dream of doing that as long as Madeline is with me."

"So here was the matter in a nutshell," said his listener to herself, as she grasped her fan fiercely and closed her lips. Unless Madeline went off, he would never marry. The great thing, of course, was to get the girl settled. She passed her obvious admirers in lightning review. There was actually not one whom she could lay her finger upon as a possible son-in-law for the little gentleman beside her. She knew several who would have gladly proposed to Madeline, but Madeline never gave them a chance. Why? She would make it her business to discover the reason why Miss Madeline was so cold and difficile, and to find out *who* he was? Mr. Jessop knew. Oh, if she only had a chance of exercising her fascination on that sour-looking barrister! Madeline had had a note from him recently, and she had been on the point of perusing it when she had been disturbed: she frequently mistook Madeline's letters for her own, and had glanced over a good deal of her correspondence. It had proved extremely commonplace, but she felt confident that Mr. Jessop's letter would be of absorbing interest.

Madeline was on the alert. She had taken a sincere dislike to this tall, dashing body-guard of

hers, with her splendid toilets, shocking meannesses, her soft manners, and her sharp claws. She was aware that she tampered with her letters. She had surprised her (but not discovered herself); and seen her carry a piece of recently-used blotting-paper and hold it up before the sitting-room mirror; and she was aware, from Josephine, that Mrs. Leach had made an exhaustive search in her room, under pretense of seeking a fur collarette. Oh! she was a clumsy spy.

. . . . . .

In March, when the English season was at its height, and every hotel and villa was packed, an elderly Englishwoman, wearing blue spectacles, and a small sandy-haired girl, wearing a tailor-made and sailor hat—that seal of British livery—toiled up the staircase of the Grand Hotel, followed by their luggage. At the first landing the young lady stopped and stared at a very smart apparition which had just come out of a sitting-room—a pretty, tall girl, dressed with much elegance in a plum-colored cloth coat and skirt, a white cloth waistcoat, white felt hat with purple velvet, white gloves, white sunshade. Could it be possible that she was Madeline West? Madeline, the pupil-teacher at Mrs. Harper's? She raised her eyes: yes, it *was* Madeline. She would speak.

"Madeline—West, I am sure. Don't you remember me at school—Nina Berwick?"

"Oh, yes, of course," shaking hands.

"Growing up makes a difference, doesn't it?" (Growing rich makes a difference, too.)

"You are staying here?" said Miss Berwick, effusively.

"Yes, we have been here ever since Christmas."

"How nice! I hope we shall see a great deal of one another, and have talks over old times."

"Yes," assented Madeline, coloring, "that will be charming."

"You are not married, are you, Madeline?"

"What has put such an idea into your head?" was the misleading reply; Madeline was clever at evasion and subterfuge: practice makes perfect.

"You see we have been living abroad for two years, and are rather out of the way of news. I am living with my aunt, Lady Fitzsandy. She hates England. Well, I'm nearly dead, and very dusty and thirsty. Our rooms are on the quatrième etage, and the lift is out of order, I hear, so I must toil up. Ta-ta!" and she hurried away after the porters and her relative.

Nina Berwick had left school just after the breaking up—Madeline recalled this with a sensation of relief. She came from the borders of Scotland, and knew nothing; besides, she was always intensely stupid, and never could remember anything—names, dates, historical events, and even school events went through her sieve-like brain. She had not been a particular friend of Madeline's, and had only known her in those days when she had fallen from her high estate—never as the rich Miss West.

For her part, Nina Berwick was amazed at

her friend's transformation. She occupied a suite on the first floor. She had an English footman, a private sitting-room, a Paris frock, and yet she was not married! The Misses Berwick were well-born but poor; their aunt could not afford them the delights of a London season. She carried them abroad, where they had never heard of Madeline's social successes. Lady Fitzsandy roved about the Continent, from one gay center to another, and was extremely anxious to get her nieces settled—especially Lucy, who was plain and twenty-eight.

Lady Fitzsandy gladly foregathered with Mr. West's pleasant party. They always joined forces after dinner in the hall, and took coffee together. And her ladyship was specially charmed with Mrs. Leach, Miss West's chaperon, who was so sweet and so handsome—she was connected, too, with her own cousins, the Horse-Leaches—and seemed so pleased and interested to hear that Nina had been at school with Miss West.

"The dear girls," as she pointed out the pair sitting side by side on a distant divan, "were going over old times three years ago, and talking so happily together." This is what they were saying, and what Mrs. Leach would have given her best ring to hear:

"And so your father came home very wealthy, Maddie? And you live in London, and have had two seasons, and go everywhere—and know everybody?"

"Oh, I don't know about that."

"Well, of course, you have hosts of admirers."

"I don't know about that either!"

"Nonsense, I'm sure you have had hundreds. What was the name of that gentleman at school?"

"Gentleman at school—there were no gentlemen—at school."

"Now don't be silly! He was the friend of some people that used to come to the breaking-up. He danced with you, and Miss Selina was wild. I'm sure you must remember him."

"I don't want, as you may easily imagine, to remember anything about *school*, except," picking herself up, "some of my schoolfellows."

"Oh, now, let me see, I've a shocking memory for names. I think his name began with N, or was there an N in it?"

"There was *nothing* in it—will that answer as well? There is to be a big ball here to-morrow; you are just in time."

"In the hotel?"

"Yes; it will be a capital dance."

"But I know no men."

"I know any number, and I will get you partners," said Madeline, recklessly.

And Madeline kept her word, to the intense enjoyment of Miss Berwick, who, thanks to her schoolfellow, had quite a delightful plurality of cavaliers. It seemed so strange to Nina Berwick to see Madeline West, the shabby drudge whom she had pitied at school, now surrounded with every luxury and crowds of smart acquaintances, with a carriage and servants at her orders, and all the best partis at her feet.

She was extremely good-natured, and did her utmost to give this rather plain, dull little spinster a good time. She got up picnics and golf tournaments. She took her for long drives and pleasant expeditions.

One afternoon Miss Berwick's grandmamma and Mrs. Leach remained at home, had tea together, and talked Miss West over in her own sitting-room. Lady Fitzsandy liked Miss West, and sang her praises in a mild key; ditto Mrs. Leach, in a yet louder strain, with one occasional piercing high note—that note a "but." "But she is wildly extravagant; but she is wonderful, considering her antecedents; but she cannot live without excitement; but she is uncertain in her friendships."

But Lady Fitzsandy was stanch, and said, "I must say that, as far as I can judge, Miss West is true to old friends. She is very much attached to Nina."

Mrs. Leach, on her own part, professed a rival attachment for Miss Berwick, gave her autographs—which she was collecting—also a box of pralines, and took her arm round the gardens once, treated her to coffee at the Casino, and there pumped her to the best of her ability.

"And so Madeline was only a pupil-teacher when you were at school, you tell me, dear?"

"Yes; I was there fourteen months, for finishing. I was among the elders, and she had charge of the small fry; I did not come across her at classes or in school hours, but I used to

meet her in passages, and in the boot-room, and sometimes we waltzed together on half-holidays. I always liked Maddie."

"And you left before her?"

"Yes; I left last Christmas three years, after the breaking-up dance. I recollect Maddie played, to save the old skinflints a guinea. But the end of the evening she danced with a man several times, and Miss Selina was furious; I think he admired Madeline, and that was her reason."

"And what was his name, darling?"

"I really cannot remember. I asked Madeline about him, and she rather snubbed me; but it was something beginning with an N, I think."

Oh, what a tiresome, stupid creature! "You cannot recollect, darling?"

"No; except that there was an N in his name! I am sure of that."

"And so Madeline remained on for a year; and did you never hear *anything* more of the school after you left?"

"Yes; let me see, I did hear something, I may have dreamed it, that some one was expelled."

"Expelled!" with a slight start. "Dear me, how shocking!"

"I cannot recollect, but I am sure it was not Madeline. She was not that sort of girl; and I may have read it in a book. I get so mixed between what I have heard and what I have read about; but, I am awfully absent and dreamy."

"Have you kep up a correspondence with any of your schoolfellows?"

"Oh, no! I hate letter-writing; and I detested school. But I always liked Maddie West. She was so pretty to look at, so pleasant to talk to, so good-natured. And she is not a bit changed. She is a dear."

"There never was any—you never heard of *her* getting into any scrape at school, did you?"

"Oh, no; what a funny idea—a scrape! Why, Maddie was as strict about the rules as the Harpies themselves!"

"And this gentleman that admired her?"

"Oh, it was only at our dances, the breakings-up; he never gave her a second thought."

So Mrs. Leach had wasted her blandishments, her time and her money all for nothing on this half-witted, tow-headed girl. When she realized the fact, she rose rather abruptly—looking surprisingly sour, paid at the *comptoir*, and led the way back to the promenade in somewhat gloomy silence.

The Berwicks went on to Pau a few days later, and were lost sight of once more, as is the usual way with these wandering birds of passage.

CHAPTER XXXVI

TO MEET THE SHAH-DA-SHAH

Mr. West returned home early in the season, and inaugurated his arrival with new horses, new liveries, new footmen, and gave a series of most *recherche* dinners. He would have bidden Mr. Wynne to one of these banquets, for the old gentleman had a tenacious memory (especially for things that his daughter expressly wished he would forget), but she quietly turned the subject; and did not encourage the idea of entertaining her husband under her unsuspicious parent's roof.

"But he belongs to my club, The Foolscap. I see him there now and then, and he seems a popular chap, and to know every one. I heard Fotherham—Lord Fotherham—pressing him to spend a couple of days with him up the river, and they say his articles and writings are quite popular."

"Oh, I don't think literary people are very interesting; you have always to get up all their works, and be able to stand a stiff examination in them, if you want to invite them here. Did you see the failure of a great bank in Australia

—it was among the telegrams in the "Echo" this evening?" she added artfully.

"No. Bless my soul! what bank? Where is the paper?" in great excitement. And Mr. West's mind was hurried away into another channel, and Mr. Wynne's invitation-card was not dispatched.

Madeline found time to pay many stealthy visits to Harry, who was really a beautiful child, of whom even the most indifferent mother might well feel proud. He could talk and walk so nicely, and was such a pretty endearing little fellow, that her visits, from being spasmodic and irregular, became of weekly occurrence.

Impunity had emboldened her, and every Saturday morning, when her father imagined her to be shopping, or in the park—found her in Mrs. Holt's old-fashioned garden, walking and playing between high hollyhocks, sunflowers, and lavender bushes, with a fair-haired little boy. What would Mr. West have said had he seen his lovely daughter running round and round, and up and down the gravel path, driven by two knotted reins, and a small fierce driver, wielding a long whip with a whistle at the end of it?

Mr. and Mrs. Wynne never met, for her days, as we have seen, were Saturdays, and his were invariably Sundays.

Low fever was prevalent that sultry month of June, also typhoid and diphtheria. The latter fastened its grim clutch on little Harry. It was a case which developed rapidly. The child had

been hot and heavy, and not his usual bright talkative self, when his mother saw him on Saturday. Mrs. Holt attributed this entirely to the oppressive weather, and to thunder in the air. On Sunday his father, justly alarmed, summoned the local doctor, who at once pronounced that the little patient was a victim to diphtheria.

On Monday Madeline was sent for. The child was a shade better, though still very ill. He lay in his cot and gazed at her with large distended eyes—and gasped out "Mummy—mummy," as he held out his little hot hands.

She remained all day, for it so happened that her father was out of town; but, under any circumstances, she assured herself, she would have stayed all the same; and when she finally departed, late in the evening, the patient was sleeping, and the doctor's opinion more encouraging. He assured her that she need not alarm herself, as he walked down with her to where the fly stood waiting in the lane.

"You really need not be uneasy, my dear madam," he said impressively, "unless things take a most unexpected turn, and then, of course, we will let you know. He is a fine healthy child, and admirably nursed by yonder good woman," nodding toward the house.

"She is indeed a good woman!" returned Madeline fervently, as her thoughts recalled Mrs. Holt's unwearying care and night and day attendance on her nursling. She even seemed to grudge her permission to feed him, or to moisten his lips.

"I'm afraid I can't come to-morrow, unless I am really needed," said Madeline plaintively. "You say there is no danger now—you ar *sure?* I may rely on you to tell me?"

"Yes; there is none whatever at present."

"Because if there were, I should remain al night."

"There is no occasion, especially if you are urgently needed elsewhere," rejoined the doctor, who nevertheless thought it rather strange that this pretty, tearful, agitated young lady should not find it the most natural thing to remain with her sick child—her only child.

Promising that she should have early news the next morning by telegraph, he handed her into the fly, and bowed her off the scene, just as another inquiring relative—equally near and equally anxious—came hurrying up to him; in fact, the child's father, who had taken the short cut from the station by the path across the fields.

"Most peculiar state of affairs," thought the doctor to himself; "there must be a screw loose somewhere. The child's parents apparently well-off, fashionable people, living apart and visiting the farm separately, and never alluding to one another. What did it mean?"

Mrs. Holt promptly set the matter before him in three words. It meant that "they had quarreled." Mr. Wynne remained at the farmhouse all night, sharing Mrs. Holt's vigil and watching every turn, every movement, every breath of the little sleeper as anxiously as she did herself. In the morning there was no posi-

tive change one way or another. The pendulum of little Harry's existence seemed to have paused for a time before it made that one vital movement in the direction of either life or death.

A message was dispatched to Miss West in these laconic words—"Slept pretty well; much the same." And Madeline, relieved in her mind, entered on the work of a long and toilsome day. In short, she continued the grand preparations for a ball that they were giving that evening. It was to be the ball of the season.

Invitations had been out for four weeks. A native Indian prince, and some of the lesser Royalties had signified their intention of being present. Mr. West looked upon the festivity as the supreme occasion of his life, the summit of his ambition—fully and flawlessly attained—and he was happy. Only, of course, there is a thorn in every rose; in this rose there were two thorns. One—and a very sharp one—the disquieting rumors of financial affairs in Australia, where a great part of his huge income was invested; and the other and lesser thorn—the announcement of Lord Tony's engagement to an old acquaintance and partner, Miss Pamela Pace.

And so his dream of calling Lord Tony by his Christian name, as his son-in law, was at an end. However, he was resolved to make the most of the delightful present, and to give an entertainment, the fame of which should ring from one end of London to the other. He fully carried out his motto, "money no object." The floral decorations alone for hall, staircase, ball-

rooms, and supper table came to the pretty penny of two thousand pounds. The favorite band of the season was, of course, in attendance. As to the supper, it was to be a banquet, the menu of which would make an epicure green with envy; and Madeline's dress was to come direct from Doucet, and had been specially designed for the occasion by Mr. West's commands.

With all these splendid preparations in view, it will be easily understood that it was with some trepidation that Madeline asked her father to postpone the ball.

She made her request very timidly, with failing heart and faltering lips—indeed, the end of her sentence died away in the air when she beheld the terrible expression on her parent's face.

"Put off the ball!" he roared; "are you mad? You must have a shingle short. Put off the swells, after all the work I've had to get them! Put off"—he acutally choked over the words—"the Shah-da-shah, when you *know* there's not another day in the season! Every night is taken. Why, what do you mean? What's your reason?" he almost screamed.

"I—I thought the intense heat—I fancied Ascot—races happening to-morrow, and I'm not feeling very—well," she faltered lamely.

"Oh, bosh! You look as fit as possible. Your reasons are no reasons. I suppose you are cut up about Tony—though why you should be is more than I can say—seeing that you refused him twice."

"On the contrary, I'm delighted at his en-

gagement. Pamela Pace is, as you know, a friend of mine. He promised to bring her to the dance without fail."

"And the dance comes off on Wednesday without fail.

The suggestion of its postponement had been made on Monday—after her return from the farm.

"And remember, Madeline, that I shall expect you to stir yourself—look after the decorations, have an eye to the supper tables, and see that the men do the floors properly, and that there are no old waltzes in the programme. You will have your work cut out, and I mine. It will be the busiest day in your life—one to talk of and look back on when you are a grandmother. It's not a common event to entertain the Shah-da-shah!" As he said this he jumped up and began to pace the room, rubbing his hands in an ecstasy of anticipation.

On the morning of the ball Mr. West was early about, arranging, ordering, superintending, and sending telegrams.

"Here's a pile," he suddenly exclaimed at breakfast time, indicating a heap of letters. "I got these all yesterday from people asking for invitations—invitations for themselves, cousins, aunts, and so on, from folk who wouldn't know us last season; but it's my turn now! I'll have none of them. Whatever else the ball will be, it shall be select," waving his arm with a gesture that was ludicrous in its pomposity. "By the way, that fellow Wynne—he belongs to my

club, you know—and besides that, Bagge & Keepe have given him a brief in a case I'm much concerned in. You remember him, eh?"

"Yes, I remember Mr. Wynne," she answered rather stiffly.

"Well, I met him in the street yesterday morning, and asked him for to-morrow. He's a presentable-looking sort of chap," nodding rather apologetically at his daughter; "but, would you believe it, he would not come; though I told him it would be something out of the common. And fancy his reason"—pausing dramatically—the little man was still pacing the room—"you will never guess; you will be as astounded as I was. He said his child was ill."

Madeline never raised her eyes, but sat with them fixed upon a certain pattern on the carpet, not looking particularly interested, merely indifferent, white and rigid.

"He appeared quite in a fright," proceeded Mr. West, volubly, "and very much worried and put out. He had a case on in court, and wanted to get away. I had no idea that he was a married man; had you?"

Before Mr. Wynne's wife's dry lips could frame an appropriate answer to this awkward question, a footman entered with another bundle of notes on a salver, and thus Mr. West's attention was diverted from his unhappy daughter.

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CHAPTER XXXVII

"GONE OFF IN HER WHITE SHOES"

In due time all preparations were completed for the reception of Mr. and Miss West's guests. The grand staircase was lined with palm-trees and immense tropical ferns, and lights were cunningly arranged amid the dusky foliage; a fountain of scent played at the head of this splendid and unique approach, and here stood the host and hostess side by side.

Mr. West was adorned in a plain evening suit —(would, oh! would that he might have decked himself with chains and orders!)—and a perennial smile. His daughter was arrayed in a French gown of white satin and white chiffon, powdered with silver. Diamonds shone on her bodice, her neck, and in her hair. She required no such adjuncts to set off her appearance, but there they were! Although tired and fagged, she looked as superior to most of her lady guests —who were chiefly of average every-day prettiness—as a Eucharist lily to a single dahlia. Her color and eyes were exceptionally bright, for she was flushed by fatigue, excitement, and anxiety.

No news was good news, she told herself. The last telegram was reassuring. There was no need to fret and worry. Half the miseries in the world are those that have never happened! So she cast doubt and care behind her as she took her place in the state quadrille and prepared to abandon herself to the occasion. No one in their senses would suspect for a moment that the beautiful, brilliant Miss West had a care on her mind, much less that her heart was aching with suspense with regard to her sick child.

She indeed lulled her fears to sleep, and played the part of hostess to perfection—not dancing overmuch, as became the lady of the house, till quite late in the evening, or rather early in the morning, and having a word—the right word—and a smile for everybody.

. . . . . .

The ball went off without a single drawback. The most fastidious young men avowed they had been "well done"; the most critical chaperones could detect no shortcomings in manners, partners, or refreshments. People enjoyed themselves; there was no after-supper exodus; the men and maidens found that they were not bored, and changed their minds about "going on."

Yes, distinguished guests remained unusually late. The supper, floor, and arrangements were faultless; and Mr. West was informed by one or two important folk "that such an entertainment reminded them of the Arabian Nights for its magnificence. It was a ball of balls."

The little speculator was almost beside himself with pride and self-satisfaction. Truly those many checks that had to be drawn were already redeemed. He must, of course, pay for his whistle; but it was a pretty whistle, and worth its price.

He unfolded his feelings to his daughter as they stood alone in the big ballroom, after the last guest had taken leave and the carriages were rapidly rolling from the door. His sharp little eyes shone, his mouth twitched, his hand actually shook, not with champagne, but triumph.

"You did it splendidly, Maddie. If you were a duchess you could not have hit it off better! I often wonder where you get your manners and air and way of saying things. Your mother was something of the same style, too. She had real blue blood in her veins; but she was not so sparkling as you are, though very vivacious. I must say those Miss Harpers did their duty by you. Well," looking round, "it's all over. They are putting out the candles, and there's broad daylight outside. It's been a success—a triumph! I wish some of my old chums had seen it. Bless me, how they would stare! A trifle better than Colonial dances. And wouldn't they like to get hold of this in the Sydney 'Bulletin.' There's a personal paper for you! I feel a bit giddy. I expect I shall be knocked up to-morrow—I mean to-day. Don't you rise before dinner-time. There's the sun streaming in. Get away to your bed!"

Madeline had listened to this pæan of tri-

umphant complacency without any remark, merely opening her mouth to yawn, and yawn, and yawn. She was very tired; and now that the stir and whirl and excitement was over, felt ready to collapse from sheer fatigue. She, therefore, readily obeyed her parent's behest, and, kissing him on his wrinkled cheek, walked off to her own room.

Josephine, half asleep, was sitting up for her, the wax candles were guttering in their sockets, the electric light was struggling at the shutters with the sun.

"Oh, mademoiselle!" said the maid, rubbing her eyes, "I've been asleep, I do believe. I've waited to unlace your dress, though you said I need not; but I know you could never do it yourself," beginning her task at once, while her equally sleepy mistress stood before the mirror and slowly removed her gloves, bangles, and diamonds, and yawned at her own reflection.

"It was splendid, mademoiselle. Jamais—pas même à Paris—did I see such a fête! I saw it well from a place behind the band. What crowds, what toilets! but mademoiselle was the most charmante of all. Ah! there is nothing like a French dressmaker—and a good figure, bien entendu. There were some costumes that were ravishing in the ladies' room. I helped. I saw them."

"It went off well, I think, Josephine, and papa is pleased; but I am glad that it is over," said her mistress, wearily. "Mind you don't let me sleep later than twelve o'clock on any account."

"Twelve o'clock! and it is now six!" cried Josephine, in a tone of horror. "Mademoiselle, you will be knocked up—you—"

"Oh! *what* is this?" interrupted her mistress in a strange voice, snatching up a telegram that lay upon a table, its tan-colored envelope as yet intact, and which had hitherto been concealed by a silver-backed hand-glass, as if it were of no importance.

"Oh, I forgot! I fell asleep, you see. It came for you at eleven o'clock last night, just as the company were arriving, and I could not disturb you. I hope it is of no consequence."

But evidently it was of great consequence, for the young lady was reading it with a drawn, ghastly countenance, and her hand holding the message shook so much that the paper rattled as if in a breeze of wind.

And this is what she was reading with strained eyes. "Mrs. Holt to Miss West, 9:30.—Come immediately; there is a change." And this was sent eight hours ago.

"Josephine," she said, with a look that appalled the little Frenchwoman, "why did you not give me this? It is a matter of life and death. If—if," with a queer catch in her breath, "I am too late, I shall never, never, never forgive you! Here"—with a gesture of frenzy, tearing off her dress—"take away this rag and these hateful things," dragging the tiara out of her hair and flinging it passionately on the floor, "for which I have sold myself. Get me a common gown, woman. Quick, quick! and don't stand looking like a fool!"

Josephine had indeed been looking on as if she was petrified, and asking herself if her mistress had not suddenly gone stark-staring mad? Mechanically she picked up the despised ball-dress and brought out a morning cotton, which Madeline wrested from her hands and flung over her head, saying:

"Send for a hansom—fly—fly!"

And thus exhorted and catching a spark of the other's excitement, she ran out of the room and hurriedly dispatched a heavy-eyed and amazed footman for the cab, with many lively and impressive gesticulations.

When she returned she found that Madeline had already fastened her dress, flung on a cape and the first hat she could find, and, with a purse in one hand and her gloves in another, was actually ready. So was the hansom, for one had been found outside, still lingering and hoping for a fare. Madeline did not delay a second. She ran downstairs between the fading lights, the Tropical palms, the withering flowers, which had had their one little day, and it was over. Down she fled along the red-cloth carpetings, under the gay awnings, and sprang into the vehicle.

Josephine, who hurried after her, was just in time to see her dash from the door.

"Grand ciel!" she ejaculated to two amazed men-servants, who now stood beside her, looking very limp in the bright summer morning. "Did any one ever see the like of that? She has gone away in her white satin ball slippers."

"What's up? What's the matter?" de-

manded one of her companions authoritatively. "What's the meaning of Miss West running out of the house as if she was going for a fire-engine or the police? Is she mad?"

"I can't tell you. It was something that she heard by telegram. Some one is ill. She talked of life or death; she is mad with fear of something. Oh, you should have seen her eyes! She looked, when she opened the paper, awful! I thought she would have struck me because I kept it back."

"Anyhow, whatever it is, she could not have gone before," said the first footman, with solemn importance. "But what the devil can it be?" he added, as he stroked his chin reflectively.

This was precisely the question upon which no one could throw the least glimmer of light; and, leaving the three servants to their speculations, we follow Madeline down to the Holt. She caught an early train. She was equally lucky in getting a fly at the station (by bribing heavily) and implored the driver to gallop the whole way. She arrived at the farm at eight o'clock, and rushed up the garden and burst into the kitchen white and breathless. But she was too late. The truth came home to her with an agonizing pang. She felt as if a dagger had been thrust into her heart, for there at the table sat Mrs. Holt, her elbows resting on it, her apron thrown over her head. She was sobbing long, long gasping sobs, and looked the picture of grief.

Madeline shook as if seized with a sudden palsy as she stood in the doorway. Her lips refused

to move or form a sound; her heart was beating in her very throat, and would assuredly choke her. She could not have asked a question if her life depended on it.

Mrs. Holt, hearing steps, threw down her apron and confronted her.

"Ay, I thought it might be you!" she ejaculated in a husky voice. "Well, it's all over! . . . . He died, poor darling, at daybreak, in these arms!" holding out those two hard-working extremities to their fullest extent, with a gesture that spoke volumes.

"I will not believe it; it is not true; it—it is impossible!" broke in the wretched girl. "The doctor said that there was no danger. Oh, Mrs. Holt, for God's sake, I implore you to tell me that you are only *frightening* me! You think I have not been a good mother, that I want a lesson, that—that—I will see for myself," hurrying across the kitchen and opening a well-known door.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

DEATH AND SICKNESS

ALAS! what was this that she beheld, and that turned every vein in her body to ice? It was death for the first time. There before her, in the small cot, lay a little still figure, with closed eyes and folded hands, a lily between them; the bed around it—yes, it was now *it*—already strewn with white flowers, on which the morning dew still lingered. Who strews white flowers on the living? Yes, Harry was dead! There was no look of suffering now on the little brow; he seemed as if he was sleeping; his soft fair curls fell naturally over his forehead; his long dark lashes swept his cheek. He *might* be asleep! But why was he so still? No breath, no gentle rising and falling disturb his tiny crossed hands, so lately full of life and mischief—and now!

With a low cry Madeline fell upon her knees beside the child, and laid her lips on his. How cold they were! But no, he could not be dead! "Harry, Harry," she whispered. "Harry, I have come. Open your eyes, darling, for me, only *one* moment, and look at me, or I shall go *mad!*"

"So you have come," said a voice close to her, and starting round she saw Laurence, pale and haggard from a long vigil, and stern as an avenging angel. "It was hardly worth while now; there is nothing to need your care any longer. Poor little child! he is gone. He wanted you; he called as long as he could articulate for his 'mummy' —his 'pretty, pretty mummy.'" Here his faltering voice broke, and he paused for a second, then continued in a sudden burst of indignation. "And while he was dying, his mother was dancing!" glancing as he spoke at her visible and incriminating white satin shoes.

"I only got the telegram this morning at six o'clock," returned Madeline, with awful calmness. The full reality had not come home to her yet.

"You were summoned when the child was first taken ill. Yes, I know you had a great social part to play—that you dared not be absent, that you dared not tell your father that another, the holiest, nearest, dearest of claims, appealed to you," pointing to the child. "You have sacrificed us, you have sacrificed all, to your Moloch—money. But it is not fitting that I should reproach you here; your conscience—and surely you are not totally hardened—will tell you far sadder, sterner truths than any human lips." She stood gazing at him vacantly, holding the brass bar at the head of the bed in both hands. "It may be some poor consolation to you to know that, although your presence would have been a comfort, nothing could have

saved him. From the time the change set in last evening, the doctor pronounced the case hopeless."

Madeline still stood and looked at the speaker as if she were in a trance, and he, although he spoke with a certain sort of deliberation, and as if he was addressing one whose mind found it difficult to grasp a subject, surveyed her with a pale, set face, and his eyes shone like a flame.

"There is no occasion for you to remain; I will make all arrangements. The tie between us is severed: you and I are as dead to one another as the child is to us both. We have nothing now in common but a grave." His grief and indignation left no room for pity.

Incidents which take some time to describe are occasionally almost instantaneous in action. It was barely five minutes since Madeline had entered the farmhouse and become aware of her loss, and now she was looking with stony eyes upon the destruction of everything that in her inmost soul she valued. Her child had wound himself into her heart. He was dead; he had died in a stranger's arms, neglected by his own mother. Laurence was also lost to her forever!

"Have you nothing to say?" he asked at last, as she still remained silent and immovable.

She clutched the brass rail fiercely in her grasp; there was a desperate expression in her face. She looked like some guilty, undefended prisoner, standing at the bar of judgment.

"Have you no feeling, no words—nothing?"

Still she stared at him wildly—speechless. He scrutinized her sharply. Her lips were parched and open. There was acute suffering in her pallid face and dazed, dilated eyes. And, before he had time to realize what was about to happen, she had fallen in a dead faint.

Mrs. Holt was hastily summoned, and she was laid upon Mrs. Holt's spare bed, while burned feathers were applied to her nostrils; her hands were violently rubbed, and every old-fashioned remedy was exhausted. The farmer's wife could scarcely contain her resentment against this young woman, who had not deserved to be the mother of her dead darling, especially as she took notice of the diamonds still glittering in her ears, and of her white silk stockings and satin shoes. These latter items outraged her sense of propriety even more than Madeline's absence the previous night. She lifted up one of these dainty slippers from where it had fallen on the floor, as its owner was being carried to bed, and surveyed it indignantly.

"It's danced a good lot, this 'ere shoe! Look at the sole. Look at the satin, there; it's frayed, and it was new last night, I'll be bound! It's a pretty little foot, though; but you need not fear for her, Mr. Wynne. It's not grief as ails her as much as you think. *She* never was one as had much *feeling*—it's just dancing! She's been on the floor the whole night, and she is just about done." And, tossing the miserable tell tale shoe indignantly to one side, she added, "It's dancing—not grief!"

When Madeline recovered consciousness she could not at first remember where she was, but gradually the dreadful truth dawned upon her mind; yet, strange to say, she never shed one single tear.

"No; not one tear, as I live by bread," Mrs. Holt reported truthfully. "Her face was as dry as a flint. Did ever any one know the like?" The worthy woman, who had wept copiously herself, and whose eyes and nose testified to the fact for days, did not know, had never yet seen "the grief too deep for tears."

Madeline went—her husband having returned to town—and locked herself into the room, and sat alone with the little corpse. Her sorrow was stony-eyed and hard; her grief the worst of grief—the loss of a child. And it was edged with what gave it a searching and agonizing point—remorse. Oh, that she might have him back—half her life for half a day—to look in his eyes, to whisper in his ears! But those pretty brown eyes were closed forever; that little waxen ear would never more listen to a human voice. Surely she was the most unhappy woman who ever walked the earth, for to her was denied the comfort of atonement! She had been weak, wicked, unnatural; she had been a neglectful mother to her poor little son. And now, that she was yearning to be all that a mother should, now that she would verily give her life for his, it was too late!

So long did she remain still and silent, so long was there no sound, not even of sobs, in that

darkened room, that Mrs. Holt became alarmed; and toward sundown came authoritatively to the door with loud knocks and a cup of tea.

"A fly had arrived to take her back to the station. Mr. Wynn had ordered it, and she must come out and have a cup of tea and go. She would do no good to any one by making herself ill."

And, by reason of her importunities, Mrs. Holt prevailed. The door was thrown back, and Mrs. Wynne came out with a face that—the farmer's wife subsequently described—fairly frightened her. She had to stand over her and make her drink the tea, and had all the work in the world to prevail on her and coax her to go back to town. No, she would remain; she was determined to remain.

However, Mrs. Holt had a still more robust will, and gradually coaxed her guest into returning home for just that one night. Anyway, she must go and fetch her clothes. She would be coming for the funeral. Mr. Wynne had said something about Friday. She could return. Best go *now*.

"Yes," answered Madeline, leaning against the doorway from pure physical weakness, and speaking in a curious, husky voice. "I am going to tell my father all, and I shall return tomorrow."

And then she went reluctantly down the walk, looking back over and over again at a certain window with a drawn blind, still wearing her white shoes—Mrs. Holt's were three sizes too

large for her—and, still without one single tear, she got into the fly and was driven away.

When she returned to Belgrave Square—haggard, distraught, and ghastly in color—she found that Mr. West had kept his room the whole day; that the house had returned to its normal condition, the palms and awnings were gone, and "dinner was laid in the library." Thus she was blandly informed by the butler as she passed upstairs, the butler being far too gentlemanly a person to even hint his amazement at her appearance by look or tone.

But Miss West did not dine in the library. She went to bed, which she never left for six long weeks. Diphtheria developed itself. The drains of 365, Belgrave Square, were unjustly blamed. Miss West had got a chill the night of the dance, and it was known in society that for many, many days the charming hostess lay between life and death.

Josephine, a romantic and imaginative Gaul, had long believed that her mistress had a secret love affair. She drew her own inferences; she sympathized, and she commanded the household to keep silence respecting Miss West's mysterious errand. The morning after the ball, when diphtheria developed, the house was rapidly emptied. Even Josephine fled, and left her lady in the hands of trained nurses. Mr. West and a few domestics stuck to their posts, the infected quarter being rigorously isolated by means of sheets dipped in disinfectant fluid.

Few of the gay guests ventured to leave cards

at the house. Diphtheria is an awful scourge, and this is the age of microbes. In old times ignorance was bliss.

Many kind inquiries and anxious messages came by letter, and not a few men questioned Mr. West at his club. His daughter was such a lovely creature, so full of vitality, she enjoyed every moment of her life. Oh, it would be a thousand pities if she were to die!

Strange as it seemed, there was no more regular inquirer than Mr. Wynne. On the day when Madeline was at her worst, when three grave doctors consulted together in her boudoir, Mr. Wynne actually came to the house; and later he appeared to be continually in the club—which was more or less empty. The season was past. People were on the wing for the seaside or the moors; but Mr. Wynne still lingered on in town. Mr. West was constantly knocking up against him in the club hall or reading-room, and the more he saw of him the better he liked him. He was always so sympathetic somehow about Madeline, although he had scarcely known her, and took a sincere interest in hearing what the doctors said, and how they could not understand how or where she had caught the infection. There was not a single case of diphtheria in their neighborhood.

And his daughter's dangerous illness was not the little man's only anxiety. Part of his great fortune was also in a very dangerous condition. The panic in Australia was spreading, and though he bore a stout heart and refused to sell

—indeed, it was impossible to dispose of much of his stock—yet he never knew the hour or day when he might not find himself a comparatively poor man. As soon as Madeline was better and fit to move he would go to Sydney, and look after his own affairs. Meanwhile he began to retrench; he withdrew his commission for the lease of a moor, for a diamond and emerald *parure;* he put down all his horses but two; and he placed the Belgrave mansion on the market. The house was too large to be comfortable, and the sanitary arrangements were apparently unsafe.

As soon as the invalid was pronounced fit to move she was taken to Brighton, where, there being no risk of infection, Mr. and Miss West and suite were comfortably established in one of the best hotels, and at first the invalid made tolerable progress toward recovery. By the first of September she was permitted to go out in a bath-chair, or even to take a short drive daily. All who saw her agreed that her illness had told upon her most terribly. Her color had departed, her eyes and cheeks were hollow; her beauty was indeed a faded flower—a thing of the past!

CHAPTER XXXIX

WHITE FLOWERS

As soon as practicable Madeline stole a visit to Mrs. Holt, Mr. West having much business of importance in London.

"I have been ill," she gasped, as she tottered into the familiar kitchen, "or I would have come back long ago."

"So you have, I declare. Dear heart alive! and aged by years, and just skin and bone. Sit down, sit down," dragging forward a chair and feeling for the keys, with a view to a glass of wine for Mrs. Wynne, who looked like fainting.

"No, no. Never mind; I can't stay. But tell me where it is, Mrs. Holt—where have they buried him?"

"No, no. Now sit you down," enforcing her request with her hand. "Mr. Wynne was thinking of burying him with his own people in Kent; but it was too far away, so he is laid in Monks Norton; with a lovely stone over him. I've been there," and then she proceeded to give the unhappy mother a minute description of the funeral, the coffin with silver plates, and a full account

of the last resting-place, keeping all the while an angry and incredulous eye on her visitor's colored dress.

"You are not in black, I see," looking at her own new black merino with some complacency.

"No, Mrs. Holt; I—I never thought of it, if you will believe me. My head was full of other things, and my heart too sore; but I will wear mourning outwardly, as I wear it in my soul, and—heart—to the end of my days."

"Well, I do wonder as you never thought of a bit of black," sniffed the other, incredulously. " 'Tis mostly the first thing!"

"Sometimes, I suppose," responded her visitor wearily. "And now, Mrs. Holt, I must go; I know that you think badly of me, and I deserve it."

"Well, ma'am, I can't say but I *do!*" Her tone was of an intensity that conveyed a far greater degree of disapproval than mere words could convey. "But my opinion ain't of no value to the likes of *you.*"

"You were very good to him. You took my place; I will not thank you. You do not want my thanks. You did all for his own sake and for pure love. Oh, Mrs. Holt, if I could only live the last two years over again!"

"There's nothing like beginning a new leaf, ma'am. You have Mr. Wynne still."

"Mr. Wynne will never forgive me—never. He said so. He said—" Then her voice failed. "Good-by, Mrs. Holt."

"Ay, I'm coming to the gate with you. I'll

tell Tom Holler where to take ye; it's in or about three miles. You'd like a few white flowers? The lilies are just a wonder for beauty."

"No, no, no. I won't trouble you. I won't take them," she protested tremulously.

"Oh, but indeed you must!" Mrs. Holt was determined that, as far as lay in *her* power, Mrs. Wynne should respect *les convenances,* and, seizing a knife as they passed through the kitchen, cut quite a sheaf of white lilies, while Madeline stood apathetically beside her, as if she was a girl in a dream.

Monks Norton was an old, a very old gray country church, thickly surrounded by gravestones—a picturesque place on the side of a hill, far away from any habitation, save the clerk's cottage and a pretty old rectory house smothered in ivy.

As Madeline pushed open the heavy lych gate, she was aware that she was not the only visitor to the churchyard. On a walk some little way off stood two smartly dressed girls, whom she knew—London acquaintances—and an elderly gentleman, with a High Church waistcoat, apparently the rector.

They had their backs turned toward her, and were talking in a very animated manner. They paused for a second as they noticed a tall lady turn slowly down a pathway, as if she was looking for something—for a grave, of course. Then resumed their discussion, just where they had left it off.

"It's *too* sweet!" said one of the girls rapturously, "quite a beautiful idea, and you say put up recently?"

"Yes," assented the rector, who took a personal pride in all the nice new tombstones, "only last Saturday week. It's quite a work of art, is it not?"

"Yes," returned the second lady. "You say that it was a child, brought by the father, and that he was very much cut up. His name was Wynne—one of *the* Wynnes. It can't be our Mr. Wynne, Laura; he is not married."

"Oh, there are dozens of Wynnes," replied her sister. "And you said it was a sad little funeral, did you not, Uncle Fred? "Only the father and a friend and two country people. The mother—"

At this moment the girl was aware of some one coming behind her—a tall person, who could look over her shoulder—some one whose approach had not been noticed on the grass; and, turning quickly, she found herself face to face with—of all people in the world!—Miss West, who was carrying an immense bunch of freshly cut lilies.. She gave a little exclamation of surprise as she put out her hand, saying—

"Miss West, I'm so charmed to see you. I heard you had been so ill. I hope you are better?"

"Yes, I have been ill," returned the other languidly, wishing most fervently that these gay Misses Dancer would go away and leave her alone with her dead.

They were standing before the very grave she was in search of—a white, upright marble cross, on the foot of which was written in gilt letters—

HARRY WYNNE,
DIED [here followed the date],
AGED 2 YEARS AND 7 MONTHS.
"Is it well with the child? It is well!" (2 Kings iv. 26).

"We have just been admiring this pretty tombstone, Miss West—so uncommon and so appropriate. I have never seen that text before, have you?"

Madeline turned away her eyes, and with wonderful self-command said, "No, she never had."

"I wonder what Wynnes he belonged to. It does not say. The head of the Wynnes is very poor. The old estate of Rivals Wynne has passed out of the family. I saw it last summer. It is a lovely old place—about two miles from Aunt Jessie's — delightful for picnics. Such woods! But the house is almost a ruin. The old chapel and banqueting-hall and ladies' gallery are roofless. It's a pity when these old families go down, is it not, and die out?"

"Yes, a pity," she answered mechanically.

There was, after this, a rather long silence. Miss West was not disposed to converse. Oh, why could they not go away? and her time was so precious! Perhaps they divined something of her thoughts; for the sisters looked at one another—a look that mutually expressed amazement at finding the gay Miss West among the

tombs of a lonely rural churchyard; and one of them said:

"Is it not delightful to get into the country? I suppose you are staying in the neighborhood for the yeomanry ball?"

Madeline made no reply. Possibly her illness had affected her hearing.

"This old church is considered quite the local sight. Our uncle is the rector. If you have come to look for any particular grave, we know the whole churchyard, and can help you to find it with pleasure."

This was one of the remarks that Miss Laura Dancer subsequently wished she had not made.

Miss West murmured her thanks, and shook her head. And the girls, seeing that she evidently wished to be by herself—and, after begging her with one breath to "come and have tea at the rectory"—pranced down to the lych gate on their high-heeled shoes, followed more leisurely by the rector.

And at last Madeline was alone. But how could she kneel on the turf and press her lips to the cold marble and drop her bitter tears over her lost darling with other eyes upon her? How could she tell that the windows in yonder rectory did not overlook every corner and every grave? She laid the lilies on the turf, and stood at the foot of the new little mound for half-an-hour, kissed the name upon the cross, gathered a few blades of grass, and then went away.

The Misses Dancer, who had a fair share of their mother Eve's curiosity, had been vainly

laying their heads together to discover what had brought Miss West to Monk's Norton church; and over the tea-table they had been telling their aunt and uncle what a very important personage Miss West was in the eyes of society—how wealthy, how run after, how beautiful, and what a catch she would be for some young man if she could be caught! But she was so difficult to please. She was so cold; she froze her admirers if they ever got further than asking for dances.

"All heiresses are said to be handsome, no matter what their looks. She is no beauty, poor thing! She looks as if she is dying. How can any one admire lantern jaws, sunken eyes, and a pale face? Give me round, rosy cheeks." And the rector glanced significantly at his two nieces, who were not slow to accept the compliment.

"Oh, aunty, she is shockingly changed since I saw her last," said Laura. "She really *was* pretty; every one said so—even other women. She had an immense reputation as a beauty; and when she came into a ballroom nobody else was looked at."

"Well, my lasses," said the rector, rising and brushing the crumbs of cake from his knees, "the world's idea of beauty must have altered *very* much since I was a young man; or else your friend has altered greatly. Believe *me*, she would not be looked at *now*."

So saying, he went off to his study, presumably to write his Sunday sermon—perhaps to read the newspaper.

His nieces put on their hats again, and went out and had a game of tennis. Tennis between sisters is a little slow; and after a time Laura said:

"Look here, Dolly, supposing we go up to the churchyard and see where she has left those flowers. There would be no harm in that, would there?"

Her sister warmly agreed to the suggestion, and the two set forth on their quest with eager alacrity.

They discovered the object of their walk without any difficulty; for the lovely white lilies were quite a prominent object on the green turf.

Miss West had laid them upon the new grave —the child's grave. How strange!

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CHAPTER XL

A FORLORN HOPE

THE hurried expedition to the Holt Farm, and subsequent visit to Monks Norton, had not agreed with Miss West. She had a most mysterious relapse, inexplicable alike to her father and her medical adviser.

The former had left her comparatively better, ere starting for a long day in London. Little did he guess that the invalid had followed him by the next train, had given Josephine a holiday, had traveled into Hampshire, and gone through more mental and bodily stress than would exhaust a woman in robust health, had returned but an hour before him in a prostrate condition —and had subsequently kept her room for days.

"I cannot account for it," the doctor said. "Great physical debility. But, besides this, there is some *mental* trouble."

"Impossible!" rejoined Mr. West emphatically.

"At any rate she must be roused; or I cannot answer for the consequences. She has no wish to get well. She won't take the trouble to live.

I think, if you could manage to get her on board ship, a sea voyage might have a good effect."

Yes, that would be the very thing, and fall in with Mr. West's plans. A trip to Australia.

"How about a trip out to Sydney?"

"Yes; and the sooner you can get her off the better. Her illness is more mental than physical. She will perhaps recover amid totally strange surroundings, and where there is nothing to recall whatever is preying on her mind."

"Preying on—stuff and nonsense—preying on a goose's mind!" cried Mr. West, irascibly.

"I dare say whatever preyed upon a goose's mind would have a scanty meal," said the physician rather stiffly.

"But she has never had a care in her life!"

"Umph!" rejoined the other doubtfully. "*No* love affairs?"

"Not one."

"Well, I won't conceal from you that she is in a most critical state. Take her abroad at once; you have given up your town house, you tell me; you have no anchor, no ties. You should start immediately, and be sure you humor her, and coax her into the trip, for it is only right to tell you that it's just touch and go!"

This was terrible news to Mr. West. His daughter had lost her looks, her spirits, her health; was he to lose her altogether? He broke the news of a sea voyage to her rather timidly that same evening. She listened to his eager schemes, his glowing word-paintings, his proph-

ecy of a jolly good time, with a dull, vacant eye, and totally indifferent air.

"Yes, if he wished—whatever he pleased," she assented languidly. It was all the same, she reflected, *where* she died, on land or sea. But to one item she dissented—she objected to the proffered company of Mrs. Leach.

"This was just a sick girl's whim!" said Mr. West to himself, and he would not argue out the matter at present; but he was secretly resolved that the charming widow should be one of the party. She had written him such heart-broken letters about Madeline from Scarborough (but she had not seen Madeline since her illness had been pronounced infectious). There was no fear *now*, and the doctor had said that a cheerful lady companion, whom the invalid liked, and who would share her cabin and look after her and cheer her, was essential. Who so suitable as Mrs. Leach? He would pay her return passage and all expenses; and when Madeline had retired, he sat down and penned an eager letter to her to that effect.

In two days Mrs. Leach was at Brighton, with a quantity of luggage—boxes, bags—and, in a fascinating cloak and hat, had rushed into the hand-shake of her dear Mr. West. She was looking remarkably brilliant. Oh, what a contrast to his poor emaciated child, who increased her forlorn appearance by wearing a black dress! She did not give Mrs. Leach a particularly cordial reception.

"She does not care to see *any one*," explained

Mr. West apologetically, when he and his enchantress sat *vis-a-vis* over dessert. "She takes no interest in *anything* on earth—it's mental, the doctors say," touching his forehead. "She has had not only diphtheria, but some sort of shock. She sits moping and weeping all day; she never opens a book, never opens her lips; she never listens to half that is said to her; she won't eat, she can't sleep, and she insists on wearing black. I can't understand it."

But Mrs. Leach could; she saw it all. Whoever the man was in the background of Madeline's life, he was dead. Either that, or he had deceived her, and, as a result, she was almost crazy with grief. And what a wreck!

Mrs. Leach took everything firmly in her grasp at once; she was unusually active and busy. They were to sail in ten days, and there was Madeline's outfit; but here no interference was permitted. Madeline selected her own wardrobe—a few black gowns. However, on the other hand, Mrs. Leach looked well after Madeline's correspondence; all letters were brought first to her. She did not wish Mr. West's sharp eyes to notice the swarms of bills which pursued her, and she passed all his and his daughter's letters in review ere they were laid upon the breakfast or afternoon tea-table. Madeline never appeared until the afternoon, and exhibited no interest in the daily post; she was, however, pleased to see Lady Rachel and her brother, who came down from town, ere their departure to Scotland, expressly to wish her a bon voyage and a speedy

return. They were really quite affected when they beheld what was neither more nor less than the specter of Madeline West—the gay and radiant girl of last season!

They had brought her books, flowers, her favorite Fuller's sweets, many scraps of news, and, under the influence of their infectious spirits, she cheered up temporarily. Mrs. Leach, however, despite the coldness of Lady Rachel and surliness of Lord Tony, remained of the company, acting as a sort of female warder; and there was no really free intercourse. In spite of broad hints, she stuck most pertinaciously to her seat and her silk sock, throwing in observations every now and then. Certainly she *was* thick-skinned.

At last Lady Rachel said boldly:

"Now, Madeline, take me to your room, my dear."

Madeline rose with an effort.

"Oh, my dearest, you must not go into the draught on any account! I'll take Lady Rachel to mine."

"No, thank you, Mrs. Leach; I rather wish to have Miss West to myself for a little, and I dare say she can wrap up if the draughts are so much keener *now* than at any other time of the day," and Lady Rachel carried her point.

"I wanted to speak to you alone, Maddie," she said as she closed the door, "and that odious, thick-skinned alligator of a woman never gave me a chance! She knows that I loathe her, and might put you on your guard."

"I am on my guard. I know her, I think, even better than you do."

"And you don't like her?"

"No, I don't *trust* her."

"I should hope not. She is a regular sort of society adventuress; a notorious evil-speaker, liar, and slanderer; always poking into secrets, and levying genteel blackmail. I had *such* an account of her from Mrs. Berthon lately. I never liked her—never; but I was not up to all her history. Her father was a coal merchant, and a man of very low origin—she is a nobody. Major Leach was caught; he thought she had a quantity of money. That is always her bait—display, dress, diamonds. His family no longer speak to her, though she quotes them on all occasions, and gives them as reference to hotels and banks, and lets them in. She owes my dressmaker six hundred pounds, and she has put her off with the excuse that she is going to marry an immensely rich man!"

"Really! who can it be?" indifferently.

"Can't you *guess*, you dear blind bat?"

"Not my father?"

"Well, I hope *not*. You must rouse yourself and interfere; elderly men are so easily made fools of. Is it true that she is going with you to Sydney, or is it just a piece of gossip?"

"Yes, it is quite true."

"Then you must stop it; you really *must*, unless you wish to have her as a stepmother. She will be engaged before you are at Gib. I think I can see her in smart board-ship frocks, very

pleasant, very helpless; your father, an idle man, waiting on her assiduously, and carrying her wraps and books; you below, *hors de combat.* Oh, she will not lose her opportunity, and she sticks at *nothing.*"

"I'm afraid I can't stop her!"

"I tell you you must. I wish I was going with you instead."

"Oh, how I wish you were!"

"But I can't; my plans are cut and dried by Mr. J. I shall write to you often, dear, and expect to see you back in six months, or at least twelve, looking quite yourself; now, promise me."

Madeline, whose spirits were running down and a reaction setting in, made no answer, save tears.

Lady Rachel's warning sank into fruitful soil. Madeline plucked up sufficient energy to urge her father to relieve her of her incubus.

"I should much prefer being alone; I should indeed."

"Pooh, pooh, my dear!" recalling her doctor's advice, and thinking what an agreeable shipmate he was providing, not only for Madeline, but himself. "Nonsense; it's all settled, passages booked. No change possible."

"I shall be far happier without her."

"Oh, rubbish! You are just weak now, and fanciful. Mrs. Leach is devoted to you."

"I doubt it; and, father, let me tell you a secret. I don't like her. I am sure she is not sincere. She is not straight."

"Come, come; she is as sincere as most women. I wonder who has been putting these notions into your head—Lady Rachel, eh? Mrs. Leach gave me a hint. Lady Rachel is all very well, and very pleasant; but a bit rapid, you know."

"Whatever she does is open and above-board," protested Madeline warmly.

"I'm not so sure of *that*, my dear. Mrs. Leach knows a few things that would never stand the light, and her ladyship is aware of this, and that's why she hates our good friend, and wants to set you against her."

Madeline, weak and miserable, could not argue. She was powerless against the attractive widow. She, poor hollow-eyed wreck, was no fitting opponent for the fascinating Flora, whose battery of beauty and smiles was most effective, and had captivated Madeline's susceptible parent. Her influence was far more powerful than Madeline's on the question of what was for the benefit of the invalid, and the invalid saw that it was useless to prolong the secret struggle, and succumbed to her fate.

Laurence Wynne had not come across Mr. West for a considerable time; but he knew that the Wests were at Brighton, and that Miss West was almost convalescent. It was the end of October, London was filling, and he was lunching at his club, with one or two acquaintances at the same table, when one of them said—

"Hullo! there's old West. I must go and have a word with him presently. He looks

rather down; not half as smart and perky as last year."

"He has lost a good deal of money!" observed the other.

"Yes; but not as much as is supposed. He is an uncommonly shrewd old boy, and knows when to save himself; but he can't save himself from his present trouble. He is going to lose his daughter?"

"His what?" put in Wynne, quickly.

"Daughter. Surely you've heard of the lovely Miss West? She was the rage for two seasons. She got diphtheria in the summer, and—"

"Yes, yes; I know," impatiently.

"Well, he took her down to Brighton, and she had a bad relapse of some kind. I was there on Saturday last, and I saw her. Her carriage had stopped at a shop I was coming out of. I give you my honor I had to look at her three times before I was sure of her; she has lost every particle of color and flesh and beauty. She might be thirty-five, and gives one the idea of a person who had seen a ghost, and never got over it. Yes"—in answer to the expression of his listeners' eyes—"it's rather awful. She used to be so pretty; now she has death in her face."

"Are you in earnest, Ruscombe?"

"Why, of course I am. Old West is in a deadly funk, and taking her off to Australia, as a sort of forlorn hope. But he will never get her there alive."

"Who says so?" he asked sharply.

"I thought you did not know her, man! The

doctor who attends her happens to be my brother-in-law; and, of course, we are all interested in the *beauty*. He has a very poor opinion— Oh, are you off? The fellow is mad. He hasn't touched a morsel. What the dickens!—Oh, ho! Now, what does *that* mean—he is buttonholing the old squatter himself?"

"No, Wynne, not seen you for ages," Mr. West was saying. "I never come to the club. No spirits for anything. My daughter is ill—got a sort of relapse. The doctors say that she has some trouble on her mind—must have had a shock. Extraordinary case! She has never had a care in her life!"

Mr. Wynne made no answer, and looked down.

"She can't get up any strength, and—and takes no notice of anything, does not want to recover, and is just fading away!"

"Ah, that's bad! I suppose you have the best advice that is possible?"

What a nice, kind fellow Wynne was! When one was in trouble he quite took it to heart too; he appeared—or was it the bad light—actually grave and anxious.

"I'm taking her to Sydney, to try the effect of the sea and change; it's just a chance—a last chance."

"And when do you start?" he asked, taking out his handkerchief and wiping his brow.

"The day after to-morrow, in the 'Victoria.' We go from Tilbury Docks; as she couldn't stand the journey across, and, in fact, the more sea the

better. A lady friend is very kindly coming as her companion, just for the trip; but Madeline and I will not return to England for a year or two. I'll see how her native climate will suit her."

"Yes; I hope sincerely that it will," said Wynne. There was an atmosphere of sympathy in his vicinity that had the effect of compelling confidences.

"I think the London racketing knocked her up, and I'm never going to have a town house again. When I come back, I shall buy some ancient historical mansion, the seat of some old family that have died out, and restore it. That is, of course, if Madeline—" He left his listener to fill in the sentence.

"Yes," rather absently.

"I daresay you'll be married and settled by the time I see you again."

"I am not likely to marry," he returned quietly.

"Oh, yes, yes; I forgot—a widower, eh? And how's the child? I always forgot to ask?"

"The child is dead," he answered gravely.

"Dear me, that's a pity; children are a terrible anxiety, as *I* know! Well, I hope to come across you again, Wynne."

"I think it very likely that we shall meet again, and very shortly, for I am going out to Australia myself, almost immediately."

"No! Oh, I'm delighted to hear it! Law business, of course, with an immense fee, eh?"

"On most important business, at any rate.

And now I'll say good-by for the present, for I have a great deal to do before I start."

"And I've been jawing away about my family affairs and taking up your precious time! I'm awfully sorry. I say, I wish you could manage to come out with us in the 'Victoria.' Could you?"

"I'll do my best." And he hurried off to wire to Fenchurch Street to secure a berth.

CHAPTER XLI

"LAURENCE!"

THE "Victoria" was a crowded ship. There was a large contingent of Australian passengers, also many Anglo-Indians who changed at Aden, and a number of society swallows who were bound for Italy and Egypt. Madeline and Mrs. Leach shared a four-berthed cabin, and enjoyed the luxury of two spare berths, which served as holdalls for their belongings. Mrs. Leach had innumerable parcels, bags, boxes, books, a jewel-case, a tea-basket. She busied herself ere starting in fixing up her affairs, and annexed fully three quarters of the available space. Madeline was tired, and put on a tea-gown and lay in her berth languidly watching her partner making her toilet, arranging her hair, her dress, her rings, ere sallying forth to dinner and conquest. She looked remarkably handsome, prosperous,

and triumphant as she turned to the wretched girl in the berth, and surveyed her exhaustively. She had adopted a curious way of staring at her the last few days—a gaze of polite, half-veiled insolence—that was distinctly irritating.

"Well, dear Madeline"—the steamer had left the docks and was steadily throbbing down the Thames—"so we are off you see, and I am of the party—no thanks to *you*. Oh, I know all about it, dearest, and I know what you would little guess."

"What?"

"Ah, no matter," with a meaning smile.

"No, I suppose it is no matter," wearily. Nothing mattered, she was so tired—oh, so tired. She wished she was dead, and she slowly closed her eyes on her companion.

Mrs. Leach gazed at her in amazement. What she knew *did* matter very much. It was all very fine for Madeline to close her eyes and waive away a subject. She would discover that she, Flora Leach, had her in her power—she held her in the hollow of her hand. Luck—she called it—had dealt her an ace of trumps! People were settling into their places as Mrs. Leach entered, and there was the usual confusion in the saloon—incidental to starting. Mr. West had secured a capital seat, and he and Mrs. Leach dined happily together—and were generally taken for man and wife. The dinner and wine was good, the motion almost *nil*, a mere slight shaking, and the widow enjoyed herself vastly. Madeline was rather tired, she said; Josephine was look-

ing after her. A little soup was all she would take. Should she tell him *now?* No, the situation was too public, he would probably shout and make a scene. She would wait for a day or two, until they had their two deck chairs comfortably drawn up side by side, under the lee of a cabin, and when the dusk had come and the stars were out, she would whisper into his ear his daughter's secret.

When Mrs. Leach retired to her cabin that night Madeline was asleep. How pale and wan her face, how thin her hands, she might be dead —she wished she were. Then she took her bag out of the bottom berth—she occupied a top one by preference—and searching in its pockets, got out a letter-case, extracted a letter, and sat down to read it. It was pleasant reading, to judge by her expression, and she went over it no less than twice. The motion of the steamer was not so agreeable; in fact, it was becoming more remarkable every moment. The things on hooks were getting lively and beginning to swing. She crushed the note hastily into its envelope, thrust it into her bag, and began to undress as quickly as possible.

The next morning they were off Dover and the "Victoria" was rolling considerably. Mrs. Leach was wretchedly squeamish. She attempted to rise, she dressed with less than her usual elaboration, and staggered out into the saloon. Alas! she was too bold; the smell of fried fish was her undoing, and routed her with great slaughter. She lay in her berth all day,

and all the next day. Also Madeline; but she was not a prey to Neptune—only so tired—so tired of life, and everything.

Late in the afternoon a bustling, talkative stewardess came in and, willy-nilly, got her up, helped her to dress, put a long cloak about her, and assisted her upon deck about dusk.

"The air will do you good, miss. You are no more seasick than I am. If you stop in that stuffy cabin you'll be real bad, and the gentleman said as I was to fetch you, if you could stand. There's a nice long chair, and cushions and rug, all waiting for you in a sheltered place."

And in this chair she soon found herself, while her father fussed round and wrapped her up. The weather was certainly boisterous, the waves broke over occasionally with a long and vicious swish; but the air was strong and invigorating, and the pallid girl leaned back and drank it eagerly.

"There are a whole lot of people on board, you know, Maddie," said Mr. West, sinking into a seat beside her.

"Are there? I am sorry to hear it," she answered querúlously.

"Oh, I say; come, come! and all so anxious to see you again."

"See me again!" with a weary little laugh, "they won't *know* me when they do see me."

"There is Lady Stiff-Staff going out to Bombay with her daughters, and Captain Vansittart, and Miss De Ville, who was at school with you."

"Oh, I can't *bear* her!" was the petulant reply.

He was about to add, "and Mr. Wynne," but she could not bear him either, nor dare he mention that it was Mr. Wynne who had urged him to get Miss West on deck, at all costs, if she was not seasick; Mr. Wynne who had helped to find a stray corner, and brought up cushions and rugs (Mr. Wynne who had secretly tipped the stewardess a sovereign). He was a nice, warm-hearted fellow. He was glad he was on board (Wynne was a whist player), he liked him. A pity Maddie had such a prejudice against him.

Mr. West talked on, asked for poor Mrs. Leach. "Josephine, I hear, is dead," he remarked, "or *says* she's dead. It's a mercy you are a good sailor. This bit of a breeze is nothing. Wait till you see how it blows off the Lewin! And I dare say, once we are round Finisterre, it will be a mill-pond. Now I'm dying to smoke, and as I know you can't stand it, I'll go for a bit. Shall I ask Lady De la Crême to come and sit here in my place, and amuse you—eh?"

"Oh, no—no. I don't want any one, I'm going down soon."

She remained for some time in a half-dreamy state, watching the sea, the flying wrack of clouds, the somewhat faint and timid young moon, which occasionally peeped forth. Her eyes had become accustomed to the dim light, when she was rather surprised and annoyed to see a tall man approach and coolly seat himself in her father's chair—which was drawn up along-

side, and almost touching hers. Presently he spoke.

"Madeline," he whispered, leaning toward her.

"Laurence! Not Laurence?" she exclaimed faintly.

"Yes—I hope you are better?"

"No." A long pause, and then, in a dead, dull tone, she added, "I hope I am going to die."

"What is the matter with you?"

"They call it by some long Latin name; but you and I know what it is."

"Your father is still in the dark?"

"Yes, it is scarcely worth while to tell him *now;* no need to worry him for nothing. When I am dead you will forgive me, Laurence, and—and think less hardly of me?"

"You are not dead, or going to die, and I prefer to forgive you when you are alive."

"And will you—but no, you won't —you cannot—why should you? I don't expect it," she said in hurried gasps. "What can I do now to atone?"

"Get better, get quite well, and I will forgive you *everything.*"

She laughed, a queer little hollow laugh, and then said:

"How strange that you should be on board. Are you going to Egypt?"

"No—to Sydney."

"Why? Have you friends there, or business?"

"Both; urgent affairs, and I expect to meet

friends. Your father says he is delighted that I am a fellow-passenger. He likes me."

"How—how extraordinary!"

"Yes; you do not flatter me. But at least it is fortunate— Well, now, you will have to go down. It is getting rather chilly."

"Oh, no, no; I like being here. And the cabin is stuffy, and Mrs. Leach is so—so—such a wretched sailor."

"Then I am truly sorry for you. But you really must go. I'll guarantee to take you below quite safely."

"No, no. Papa will—"

"It's as much as he can do to keep his legs, much less steer another. But if you prefer it, I'll call the stewardess."

"No; never mind"—rising and staggering, and putting a mere skeleton hand on his; and, as he supported her tremulous steps, he realized how fearfully weak she was.

They got downstairs safely, and, as she paused, breathless, for a moment under the great electric light, they looked into one another's faces for the first time since that June morning.

It was all that Wynne could do to repress an exclamation of horror, as a white, hollow-cheeked specter raised her sunken, hopeless-looking eyes to his. Even the doctor's brother-in-law had not prepared him for *this*.

"Stewardess," he said, as soon as he could control his voice, "take great care of this lady. Make her eat. Get her some supper at once—some hot soup and a glass of Burgundy. You

must have something to eat before you turn in."

"Oh, no; I could not," she protested feebly. "I don't want anything."

"Oh, yes you do; and you will be sure to come up early to-morrow. I'll come and fetch you about eleven o'clock, weather permitting." And he walked off, and went on deck to a distant part of the ship, and leaned over the bulwarks alone.

His old feeling for Madeline had come to life. That wasted form, those tragic eyes had touched him—cut him to the heart. Yes; she looked as if she was about to follow the child. If she had been to blame, he himself was not guiltless. He had upbraided her too bitterly; he had left her to bear her grief alone; he had not made sufficient allowance for her youth, her natural craving for the pleasures and delights of girls of her age. The domestic yoke had been laid upon her childish shoulders, and what a cruel weight it had proved! Why should he have been astonished that she should be glad to slip her neck from under it for a year or two! She had no girlhood. She was endowed with a gay, happy, sun-loving temperament. He should not have left the telling of their secret in her hands; he should have spoken to Mr. West himself. He would do so now, within the next few days. If Madeline was going to die, she should leave the world as *Mrs. Wynne!* But, whether she was to live or die, she should have his incessant care.

Day by day Madeline appeared on deck, and

day by day gained some steady but scarcely perceptible improvement. Mr. Wynne took much of her father's attendance off his hands, and left him free to smoke and gossip and play whist. He arranged her pillows and rugs in her chair; saw that it was sheltered; talked to her when she was inclined to talk; told her everything that was likely to amuse her; brought up, or caused to appear at frequent intervals, soup, grapes, champagne, tea, arrowroot, and used all his persuasions to induce her to partake of them. He had an unlimited supply of magazines, books, and picture-papers, which he read to her when she was disposed to listen; and, when she had looked them over, occasionally she fell asleep; and he sat beside her, contemplating her white and death-like appearance with a countenance to match.

However, every sleep, every smile, was an inch on the road to recovery. Mr. West was extremely obliged to him for his kind attentions to his daughter. He himself was very fond of Madeline, and, naturally, most anxious about his only child. But he confessed that he did not understand sick people, and was no hand at nursing. He felt doubly grateful to Wynne for his assiduity, and the politeness and interest with which he listened to his own discourse.

He talked to Wynne confidentially—chiefly about finance. He had lost some money lately—a good deal more than he liked. But he never put his eggs into one basket, and had a fair amount in sound English securities.

Wynne was a steady—well—friend. Mr. West had recently experienced (and resented) a certain palpable change in the social temperature. He was no longer flattered, deferred to—or even *listened* to — as formerly. He was credited with the loss of most of his fortune—every one knew he had shares in the "Tom and Jerry" Bank—and his daughter with the loss of her beauty.

"The Wests didn't amount to much now," to quote an American lady This conviction made Mr. West extremely wroth. People thought he was played-out. Whoever was particularly civil to him *now* he took to his heart, and kept there.

One evening Laurence made his way into the smoke-room, and stood looking on at the termination of a rather hard-fought rubber. His father-in-law was playing. He was, moreover, holding good cards, and in a state of high jubilation. His partner was Lord de la Crême. Could this trim, rather jaunty little man, holding the cards he was about to deal, and laughing a loud, rather forced laugh at one of his lordship's good things —*i.e.*, a very middling joke—be a terrible domestic autocrat? Who would believe it? But Laurence looked below the surface. That quick, fiery little eye, now beaming so brightly, told a tale that he could read. It spoke of choler, obstinacy, of restless ambition, self-seeking, and fury Madeline, doubtless, knew the capabilities of that eye, and feared it.

When the whist party had dissolved, and people were gone to their berths, Mr. West—who

was always prepared to sit up—and Wynne were alone.

"I suppose Madeline went below long ago? You have been looking after her as usual?"

"Yes, I took her down."

"That's all right"—pausing. "Then play a game of *ecarte*. There's another half hour yet before lights-out."

"No, thanks. The fact is"—seating himself opposite, and squaring his arms on the table—"I want to have a few words with you."

"With *me?* Certainly, certainly" — with a momentary glance of surprise. "About those investments?"

"No; it's a more personal matter. You"—hesitating for a second—"have seemed to like me, Mr. West."

"Seemed! Why, I don't know a single young fellow that I like as well. You are clever, you are good company, you are making yourself a name. I only wish I had a son like you!"

CHAPTER XLII

WON ALREADY

"THEN, what would you think of taking me for a son-in law?" said Mr. Wynne, fixing his dark eyes steadily on the little man opposite to him, who was busily shuffling the cards.

"Eh!" was his only reply for quite a long time—an "eh!" incredulous, indignant, and yet not wholly combative—a long, sonorous exclamation. "Personally I like you, Wynne—could not like you better; but"—and he paused—"Madeline is my only child; she is remarkably handsome—*was*, I should say for the present—and created quite a sensation in town. You are a very good fellow, and a gentleman, but don't be offended if I confess that I am looking higher for her. I expect the man she marries to place a coronet on her head, and you must admit that she will grace it!"

Laurence Wynne said nothing, merely nodded his assent, and his companion—who loved the sound of his own voice—resumed volubly.

"Besides, Wynne, you are a widower! And

she does not like you; it's all very well when she is ill and helpless, and tolerates you; it's truest kindness to tell you—and, indeed, you must see it *yourself!* You have no idea the iceberg she can be. I often wonder who she is waiting for, or what she expects?"

"Look here. Mr. West, I can quite understand your views. Mad—I mean Miss West—would, of course, grace a coronet, as you say, but let me tell you that we Wynnes, of Rivals Wynne, have bluer blood in our veins than any of the mushroom titles of the last two hundred years. You will see, if you look in Burke, that we were at home before the Normans came over. We were Saxons, and still a power in the land. Our family title is extinct; but it only wants money to restore it. I have relations who—like some relations—turned away their faces when I was poor; but were I to become rich and successful, they would receive me with open arms, and introduce my wife and myself to circles as exclusive and as far beyond the stray third-rate noble paupers who prey on your—your good-nature and—pardon me—your ignorance as the moon is above the earth. I speak plainly."

"You do, sir, and with a vengeance!" said Mr. West, a little overawed by the other's imperious manner; for Mr. Wynne had said to himself, why should he be timid before this man, who at most was a *bourgeois*, whose father—best not seek to inquire into his history—whose forefathers had gone to their graves unwept, unhonored and unsung, while he, Laurence Wynne,

though he boasted of no unearned increment, was descended from men who were princes at the time of the Heptarchy!

"You value good birth, I see, Mr. West," holding out his hand as if to convey the fact that he had scored a point. "And you value success. I am succeeding, and I shall succeed. I feel it. I know it—if my health is spared. I have brains, a ready tongue, an indomitable will; I shall go into Parliament; think what a vast field of possibilities that opens out! Which of your other would-be sons-in-law aims at political life? Look at Levanter, the reputation he would bring you." Laurence shuddered as he spoke. "Do not all honest men shun him? What decent club would own him? Look at Montycute, what has he to offer, but his ugly person, his title, and his debts? He and others like him propose to barter their wretched names and, as they would pretend, the *entree* to society—not for your daughter's personal attractions, of which they think but little, but her fortune, of which they think a great deal!"

"Young man, young man!" gasped Mr. West inarticulately, "you speak boldly—far too boldly."

"I speak the sacred truth, and nothing but the truth," said Wynne, impetuously. "I offer myself, my talents, my career, my ancient lineage, and unblemished name for your daughter. As to her fortune, I do not want it; I am now an independent man. Give me your answer, sir—yes or no."

Many possibilities floated through Mr. West's brain as he sat for some moments in silence revolving this offer. Levanter and Montycute were all that this impetuous young fellow had described. He had good blood in his veins; he was handsome, clever, rising, while they were like leeches, ready to live upon him, and giving nothing in exchange but their barren names. This man's career was already talked of; he could vouch for one success, which had agreeably affected his own pocket, and, with the proverbial gratitude, he looked in the same direction for favors to come. He had an eloquent tongue, a ready pen, and a fiery manner that carried all before it. He would go into the House, he would (oh! castle-building Mr. West) be one of the great men—Chancellor of the Exchequer—some day. He shut his eyes—he saw it all. He saw his son-in-law addressing the House, and every ear within its walls hanging on his words. He saw himself, a distinguished visitor, and Madeline among the peeresses.

Laurence Wynne, keen and acute, was convinced that some grand idea was working in his companion's mind, and struck while the iron was hot.

"May I hope for your consent, sir?" he asked quickly.

"Well, yes, you may, if you can win her. You are welcome, as far as I am concerned. Yes!" holding out his rather short, stubby hand, with one big diamond blazing on his little finger. "It's time she was settled, and I'm afraid she

will never be what she was, as regards her looks. I did hanker after a ready-made title, but one can't have everything! I like you. You are tolerant of an old man's whims; you don't laugh at me under my own roof, and think I don't see it like some young cubs; you are a gentleman, and I give you Maddie and welcome, now that I have talked it over; but the hitch you will find, will be the girl herself. She is, as you may see, utterly broken down and altered, and in no mind to listen to a love tale; but, well or ill, I must tell you honestly that I would not give much for your chance."

"What would you say, sir," said Laurence, now becoming a shade paler, "if I were to tell you that I had won her *already?*"

Mr. West looked at him sharply.

"The deuce you have! And when?"

"More than three years ago."

"What! before I came home? when she was at Harpers'? Were *you* the half-starved fellow that I heard was hanging about? Oh, never!"

"I don't think I was half-starved, but I was most desperately in love with her."

"Oh, so it's an old affair?"

"Yes, an old affair, as you say, Mr. West. And you have given me Madleine if I can win her, have you not?—that is a promise?"

"Yes," rather impatiently. "I never go back on a promise."

"Well, now," leaning forward and resting his head on his hand, and speaking more deliberately, "I am going to tell you something that I am

certain will surprise, and I fear will incense you; but you will hear me out to the end. We have been married for more than three years!" He paused—not unnaturally nervous—awaiting the result of this tardy announcement.

"Why! what—what—what the devil do you mean?" stammered Mr. West, his little eyes nearly starting from their sockets. "What do you mean, sir? I—I don't believe you, so there! —don't believe a word of it!" breathing hard.

"If you will only listen to me patiently, you *will* believe me. I am going to tell you many things that you ought to have been made acquainted with long ago."

Mr. West opened his mouth. No sound came. He was speechless. And his son-in-law proceeded very steadily. "Four years ago you were said to be bankrupt, if not dead. Mrs. Harper gave you no law when your bills were not paid. You have never heard that Madeline, from being the show-pupil and favorite, sank to be the shabby school drudge—half-fed, half-clothed, and not paid for the work of two governesses. This went on for a whole year. I saw her at a breaking-up affair, when she played all night for her schoolfellows to dance. I fell in love with her then. Miss Selina hated us both, and, to satisfy her hate and malice, managed—one night in the holidays—to leave us both behind at Riverside, late for the last train. We had all been to the theater. The affair was planned. We waited where we were desired to wait, and lost the train. Next morning I called

to explain to Miss Harper; but Madeline's character was gone—she was turned out, dismissed without mercy. She had no friends, no salary, no reference. I had, at least, bread and cheese—so I took her to London and married her."

He stopped and looked at Mr. West, who was livid, and who cried out in a loud, strange voice:

"Go on, sir—go on—and get it over, before I go mad!"

"I was poor. We lived in lodgings; but we were very happy. After a time poverty and sickness knocked at our door. I had typhoid fever. It was an unhealthy season, and I nearly died. I have sometimes since thought that it would have been well if I *had* died, and thus cut the Gordian knot and released Madeline. However, I hung on, a miserable, expensive, useless invalid. In the middle of all this a child was born."

Mr. West started out of his chair; but subsequently resumed it.

"It was a boy—"

"A boy! Where is it?" demanded his listener, fiercely.

"You shall hear presently," said his son-in-law, gravely. "Madeline was the kindest of wives, nurses, mothers."

"Madeline—*my* Madeline?" said her father, in a tone of querulous incredulity and shrill irritation.

"We had no money—none. I had kept aloof from many acquaintances since I married, and my relations dropped me with one consent. We

pawned all we had, save the clothes on our backs. We were almost starving. In those days Madeline was a model of courage, cheerfulness, endurance, and devotion. When I recall those days I can forgive her much."

"Forgive her! Madeline pawning clothes! Madeline starving!" cried her father, so loudly that a sleepy cabin-steward looked in.

Mr. Wynne signed to him to go away, and continued, "Ay, she was. We could barely keep the wolf out. Then came your letter to the Harpers, and they advertised for Madeline. She saw the message, and pawned her wedding-ring to go to them. And they, never dreaming that she was married, received her with rapture as Miss West. She had no tell-tale ring, and Mrs. Harper heard that she had been in a shop in London, in the mantle department. In an evil moment Madeline saw your letter wherein you spoke very strongly against a poor love affair, and possible marriage. So, in desperation, and to get money and bread for her child and for me, she deceived you. Later on, when the influence of wealth and power and luxury ate their way into her soul, she still deceived you—and forgot us. I must speak the truth."

Mr. West nodded.

"She put off the dreaded day of telling you all, and I was out of patience. She would not allow me to break the news. You remember one evening that I called in Belgrave Square, and we went to look at a picture together? It was then that I made my last appeal."

"She gave you up, then?" he asked abruptly.

"She did."

"And the child?" eagerly. "My grandson, my heir!"

"You remember the great ball you gave last June?"

"Of course—of course," irritably. "It will not be forgotten in a hurry."

"He died that night," said Mr. Wynne, slowly.

"Eh! what did you say? Nonsense!"

"He died of diphtheria. Madeline came too late to see him alive. It was from the child she caught the infection. Yes, I believe she kissed him. He was a lovely boy—with such a bright little face and fair hair. We kept him at a Hampshire farmhouse. Many a time I told Madeline that the very sight of him would soften you toward us; but she would not listen. She made promises and broke them. She feared you too much."

"Feared *me!*"

"Since his death, I have had nothing to say to her; but I heard that she was very ill in London; and I used to find how she was going on from various people, including yourself, as you may remember. I thought my heart was steeled against her, but I find it is not. I am ready to make friends. I heard accidentally that she was in a most critical state—that day I saw you at the club—and I threw up all my briefs and business and took a passage."

"And so *she* is your business in Sydney?"

"She—she is most wofully changed. When I first saw her under the lamp, I—I—I—cannot tell you—" He paused, and drew in a long, slow breath, which said much.

"Poor girl! No wonder she looks as if she had seen great troubles. I wonder she is alive. Well, I'll not add to them! She treated me badly; but she has treated you worse. And afraid of me! Why, every one knows that my bark is worse than my bite—in fact, I have no bite—And you stuck to her when she had no friends! Oh, what a treacherous old serpent was that Harper—harridan. Steady payment for nine years. And to treat my daughter so! And I actually gave that sour old maid a present for her *kindness* to Maddie. They did not know you were married to her?"

"No; scarcely any one knows."

"And what's to be done! How is it to be declared, this marriage? How is the world to be told that Madeline has been humbugging them for the last two years as Miss West?"

"The wedding can easily be put in the paper as having taken place in London, with no date. It will only be a nine-days' wonder. We can send it from the first place we touch at."

"Ah, you are a clever fellow, Wynne. Hallo! the lights are going out, and we shall be in darkness."

"But you are no longer in darkness respecting me."

"Well, I feel in a regular fog. And so you're my son-in-law!"

"Yes, there is no doubt about that."

"It's odd that I always cottoned to you."

"You will not be harsh with Madeline, will you?"

"Do you take me for a Choctaw Indian, sir? I'll say nothing at present. Board ship is no place for scenes. She's very shaky still, though better."

"Yes, I think she is a shade better now she is on deck all day."

"It was an awful pity about the little boy, Wynne, and—"

Here the electric light suddenly went out, and Mr. West had to grope his way as best he could to his own cabin. He lay awake for hours, listening to the seas washing against the side of his berth, thinking—thinking of what he had been told that night, thinking of Madeline and Wynne in a new light, and thinking most of all of the little fair haired grandchild that he had never seen.

CHAPTER XLIII

HEARTS ARE TRUMPS

THE night of the conversation in the smoking-room, when Mr. West scrambled below in the dark—not knowing, as he subsequently explained it, whether he stood on his head or his heels—was the occasion of a curious incident in Miss West's cabin. Each day as she grew stronger and better, recovering energy and appetite, Mrs.

Leach became worse, and the weather to correspond. She sustained existence on Brand's essence and champagne, and counted the hours until they were in the Mediterranean—not that even the tideless sea can be reckoned on in October. Mrs. Leach felt miserably ill, peevish, and envious; and when Madeline came down to go to bed, she asked her to get her a bottle out of her dressing-bag—"something to make her sleep."

"Shall I hand the bag up to you?"

"No, no, it's open. A long, greenish bottle—in the pocket next the blotter."

Yes, the bag was not locked; the contents were in great confusion—combs, pins, handkerchiefs, note-paper. It was not so easy to discover the little green bottle. In turning out the loose articles Madeline came upon a letter addressed, in Mrs. Kane's scrawl, to "Miss West, care of Mrs. Harper, Streambridge," forwarded to Belgrave Square, and from Belgrave Square to Brighton. Some one had kindly saved her the trouble of opening it, presumably the lady in the top berth and the owner of the bag.

"Well, have you not found it yet? Dear me, how slow you are!" she exclaimed fretfully.

"Oh, yes. I've found it."

"Then do be quick. I feel as if I should *die* from this nausea and weakness."

Fortunately the little bottle turned up at this instant, and Madeline (having closed the bag and secured her letter) handed it up to Mrs. Leach, who next demanded "eau de Cologne, a hand-

kerchief, another shawl, a tumbler, and some hairpins."

It was some time before she was at rest behind her curtains. The positions were reversed, and Madeline, the invalid on land, was not the invalid at sea. At last she sat down to read her letter. She had had no communication with Mrs. Kane since she had been at Harperton, from whence she had sent her a ten-pound note. Luckily for her, Mrs. Kane never saw the society papers, and had no idea that her late lodger had blossomed out into a society beauty, much less that she lived in London, otherwise undoubtedly she would have had the pleasure (?) of a visit from her correspondent. The letter said:

"2, Solferino Place.

"DEAR MADAM—I hope, in remembrance of *old times*, you will excuse my writing; but I am very hard set just at present, and would feel obliged if you could spare me a small matter of twenty pounds, Kane being out of employment since Easter Monday. I hope Mr. Wynne and your dear baby are well. The baby must be a fine big fellow by this time--two last winter—and a *great amusement.* Has your pa ever found out the trick as you played—how, when he thought you was snug at school, you were a whole year living in London in this house?

"I hope you won't disappoint me regarding the money, as having your *own* interests to consider as well as I have *mine.*

"Yours affectionately,

"ELIZA KANE."

The postmark on the envelope was dated two days before they had left Brighton. And this was what Mrs. Leach meant by her hints and looks. This stolen letter was to be her trump card.

The next morning, when Madeline left her cabin, she was met by Laurence. He was, as usual, waiting, hanging about the passage and companion-ladder. At last a tall, slight figure in black appeared, a figure that walked with a firmer and more active step, and that no longer crawled listlessly from cabin to deck. It was Madeline, with a faint color in her face; she accosted him eagerly.

"Oh, Laurence!" she began, "I have something to tell you. Come into the music-room; it is sure to be empty."

And then, in a few hurried sentences, she unfolded her discovery and placed Mrs. Kane's nice little letter in his hands.

"Of course, now I shall speak. Of course, I seem a miserably mean, cowardly creature! It is only when forced by circumstances that I open my lips at last. Mrs. Leach has long guessed that I had a secret and a *past*—but, strive as she would, she could never find out anything definite."

"This is very definite," said Laurence, dryly.

"It is, indeed. I could not understand her intense scorn for me latterly. Laurence, I meant to have told my father immediately after—after last June, but I was ill; and then, as I used to lie thinking, thinking, I said to myself, I may as

well carry the secret to the grave, for now the child is gone, and Laurence is gone, what is the use of speaking?"

"But you see that Laurence is not gone!" he exclaimed expressively; "and we will let bygones be bygones instead. I am before both you and Mrs. Leach. I told your father last night. He took it, on the whole, surprisingly well! I have not seen him this morning, though. He won't allude to it at present. Board ship is no place for scenes, he says; and I am entirely of his opinion; so, my dear, you need not look so ghastly. Now, come along on deck. We shall soon sight Tarifa. Ah! here is Mr. West at last."

The music-room was pretty full as the little man came slowly toward the pair, who sat apart on a couch at the end of it. He looked unusually solemn, and he had discarded his ordinary blue bird's-eye tie for a black one. He avoided his daughter's glance, and fixed his attention on her mourning-gown, as he said:

"Well, how are you to-day, Madeline, my love?"

"I feel better—much better."

"That is good news! Then come on deck and see the Spanish coast?"

He sat next to her—their steamer-chairs placed closely side by side—in silence for a long time, smoking, and apparently buried in thought; then, as he suddenly noticed Wynne's signet-ring on her wedding finger, he leaned forward, took her fragile hand in his—it trembled, for he

held it long and contemplated it intently—and at last released it with surprising gentleness.

"Madeline," he said, "I *know* you've had enough trouble. I'm not going to say one word; but I'm greatly cut up about what happened—last summer;" and Madeline drew her veil over her face to hide her streaming tears.

After they had crossed the notorious Gulf of Lyons, Mrs. Leach appeared, with languid airs, expecting attention, solicitude, and sympathy. Alas! for expectations. What a change was here! Mr. West was entirely engrossed with Madeline, and was positively curt and gruff (he had heard the history of the letter in the bag); and when at last she found an opportunity of talking to him privately, and began with little preamble about "dear Maddie—such a marvelous sailor—so *much* better—Getting away from some dreadful hold on her—and influence—seems to have transformed her into a new creature!" Mr. West looked at the speaker keenly. The sea-breeze is searching, and the southern sun pitiless. Ten days' sickness had transformed Mrs. Leach into an *old* creature! She was fifty-five or more, with her sunken cheeks, and all those hard lines about her mouth and eyes. What did they signify?

"Do I see Mr. Wynne on board?" she asked, with a tragic air—"over by the boats? How strange, how audacious!"

"Do you think so? He is Madeline's husband, and a great friend of mine."

Mrs. Leach gasped! The wind had been taken out of her sails.

"Then *you* know all about it?"

"Yes, I know all about it," said Mr. West collectedly.

"You have not known it for long—not when we sailed?"

"No, not quite as long as *you* have, Mrs. Leach"—looking at her expressively.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, for one thing, that I obtained my information through a legitimate channel; that, as you are such a victim to the sea, it will be only humane to land you at Naples. It would be *cruel* to take you on to Melbourne; and Madeline has a companion entirely to her taste in Laurence Wynne."

"And oh, what a tale for London!" she exclaimed with a ghastly sneer. "I am feeling the motion a good deal—perhaps you will be kind enough to assist me to get below? I find I must lie down."

To tell the truth, she had been completely bowled over—thanks to a strong breeze and a strong opponent.

Mrs. Leach landed at Naples and enjoyed an exceedingly pleasant winter in Rome—due to a handsome check which she had received from Mr. West, nominally as a return for her kind interest in his daughter, and really as a golden padlock for her lips.

Mr. West, once in Sydney, contrived to pull a good many chestnuts out of the fire, and returned

to England as wealthy as ever, purchased the old estate of the Wynnes, and restored the half-ruined house in a style in keeping with its ancient name.

Madeline and her husband spend a great deal of their time at Rivals Wynne, though their headquarters are in London, and some day the old home will descend to the old race. The children are beautiful; another little Harry is the picture of the one that is lost, but not forgotten, as fresh white wreaths upon a certain grave can testify. Mr. Clay, the rector, has seen Mrs. Wynne placing them there with her own hands. She made no secret of it *now*.

"It is the grave," she explained, "of our eldest little boy. I will bring his brother and sister here by-and-by."

The rector, when he takes strangers round the churchyard, and points out the most noticeable tombstones, halts for a good while before a certain marble cross, and relates the story of a mysterious young couple who visited the grave separately, but who now come together, with other children in their train.

Mr. Laurence Wynne continues to "rise." He is in Parliament, and a man of such note that Mr. West no longer casts a thought on Madeline's lost coronet. Lord Montycute has married a rich widow twenty years older than himself. Lord Tony is happily settled, and Lady Tony and Madeline are fast friends. Lady Rachel is little Madeline's godmother. She is a pretty child, sufficiently spoiled by her father,

but ruined by her doting grandpapa. She is an imperious little person, but obedient and docile with her mother. It is only poor grandpapa whose miserably scanty locks she puts into curl papers, whom she drives about in a pair of long red reins, and whom she rules with a rod of iron.

THE END.



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